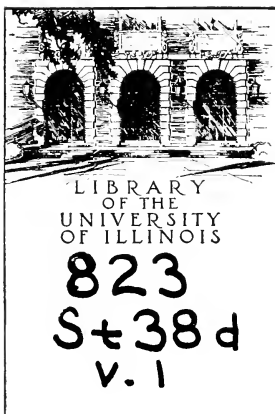
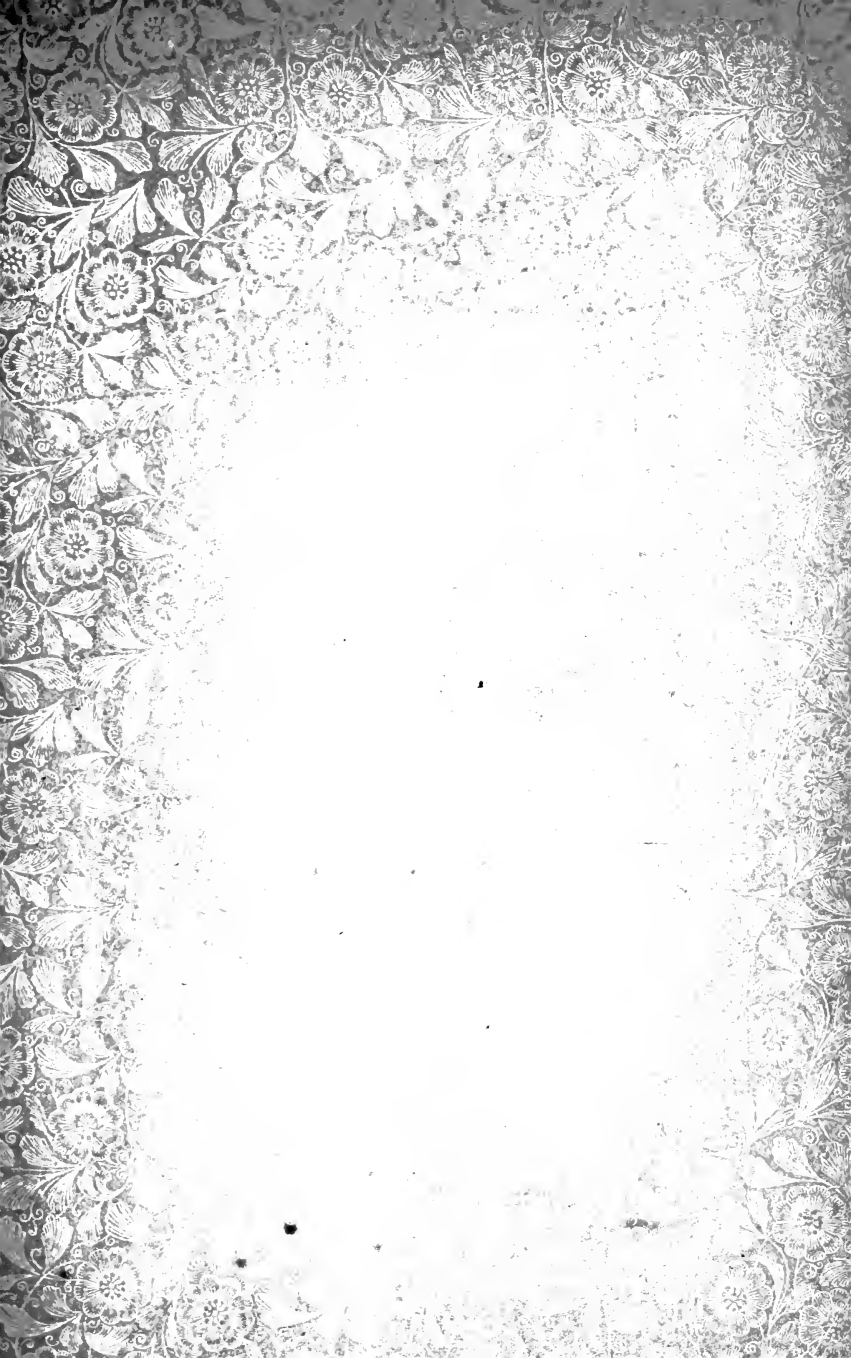
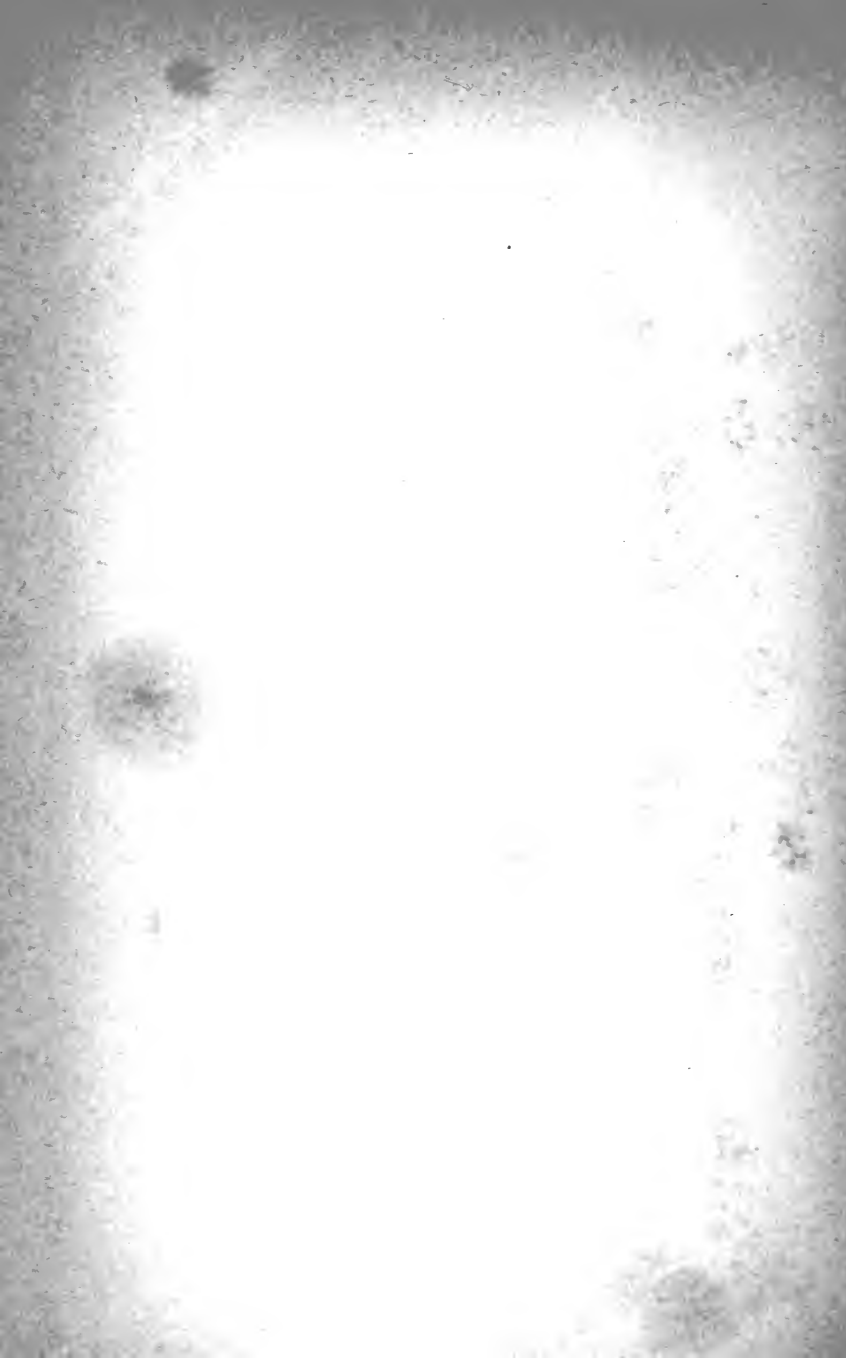


EMPLETHORPE  
THE AUTHOR OF ST OLAVE'S









DIMPLETHORPE.

VOL. I.

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

<http://www.archive.org/details/dimplethorpe01tabo>

# DIMPLETHORPE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,” “ANNETTE,”

“LITTLE MISS PRIMROSE,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,  
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1880.

*All rights reserved.*

LONDON :  
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.  
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

T. C. Fair- Johnson, 28 Mar. 1952.

823  
St 38 d  
v. 1

## DIMPLETHORPE.

---

### CHAPTER I.

*Gen. rev. Ray 12.5.51 D. C. Fair- Johnson: 30.*  
“D IMPLETHORPE, a parish in the Hundred of Thornilaugh; acreage 5,000; population 951; distance from London twenty miles, E.N.E. The lordship of Dimplethorpe was formerly held by the De Meuries, and passed from them into the hands of the Saxbys, by whom it is at present possessed. The living is a discharged vicarage, value £840, and is in the gift of the Saxby family. Dimplethorpe contains the ruins of a moated castle, once occupied

by the De Meuries, who received the grant of it from Henry the Second, a small church of early English architecture, and a market cross. There is also a neat place of worship for Independents."

Such was the style and title of Dimplethorpe, as given in "Crawley's Gazetteer of the South Eastern Counties," published in 1825. And fifty years later, years during which England had struggled through reform bills, railway agitations, wars, panics, prosperities, depressions, and "developments," nothing more need have been said about it, except that the market cross was a little mouldier, the church services—in consequence of ritualistic leanings on the part of successive curates—more carefully carried out, and the "neat place of worship for Independents" not quite so numerously attended as in the former minister's time.

It was an innocent, restful old town, if

town that could be called which had but one irregular street, oozing lazily along for about three quarters of a mile, from the Manor House at one end, where General Burnaby and his sister now lived, onward through all sorts of tumble-down lath-and-plaster houses, buried in ivy and woodbine, to the aforementioned castle at the other end, once occupied by the De Meuries, and surrounded by a moat which was in the highest degree picturesque and unhealthy.

But there were many things in Dimplethorpe which vied with that duckweedy moat in being picturesque and unhealthy. Indeed, the general sanitary condition of the place was a subject to be mentioned under reserve. Open sewers came to the front without the least regard for appearances. In matters of drainage, every landlord did that which was right in his own eyes, the goddess of cleanliness having as yet no high

priest in the person of a Dimplethorpe Inspector of Nuisances. Occupiers of garden plots had long since made up their minds that there could be no better disposition of sewage than to let it accumulate in an open tank in some secluded corner, whence, at judicious intervals, it was spread over the land, producing such crops of early potatoes and spinach, such wealth of pinks, roses, wallflowers, and scented stocks, as made Dimplethorpe the envy of all the country round. And what more could Dimplethorpe want than that? So it let the open tanks alone.

Ventilation was treated in much the same way, except that, being left to the care of the womenfolk, it perhaps fared a little worse. Tidy housewives, who had fireplaces in their bed-rooms, looked upon them chiefly as accessories with malice aforethought, to the descent of rain and soot, and they



stuffed them up accordingly, summer and winter alike, with bags of straw made for the purpose. Because, as Mrs. Ferguson, the independent minister's wife, said—and Mrs. Ferguson was the best housekeeper in Dimplethorpe—you might as well not put up clean fire-aprons at all, and spend hours and hours in blackleading your chamber grates, if you were to run the risk of having them spoiled for your pains every time there was a shower of rain or a breeze of wind, or an old owl chose to shake itself in your chimney. So Mrs. Ferguson's chambers always had a "stuffy feel" about them, but, at the same time, her fire-aprons were a marvel of snowy stiffness; and as for her grates, if they had been carved out of Whitby jet one could not have said they were blacker or brighter.

But the minister's house was an old-fashioned place, with windows that would

not shut down close, and age-shrunk doors that let in a wholesome current of air underneath, and so the Ferguson girls, five of them, one step above another, Audrey, Rose Emma, Frances Ann, Phillis, and Anna Mary, grew up as rosy-faced and bright-eyed as any in the parish.

Which was saying a great deal for them. For you might take many a summer day's journey over the country side to find bonnier specimens of rustic childhood than the lads and lasses who swung on the stiles, or dabbled in the ponds, or delved amongst the hedgebottoms of Dimplethorpe. And perhaps it was because they did so much swinging and dabbling and delving—School Boards not having at that time penetrated into the rural districts—that the open drains and the closed chimneys did them so little mischief.

Dimplethorpe was, as the *Gazetteer* pro-

foundly remarked, twenty miles E.N.E. from London. And it was only forty from Cratchley Cliff, a pretty and rapidly increasing town upon the coast. And that slimy octopus, the East Warrenshire railway, had had its eye fixed for some time past upon Cratchley Cliff, with intent to stretch forth a feeler and suck up a little nutriment from the traffic which might be produced, if that part of the coast could be brought within easy reach of London. The nearest cut to Cratchley lay through the willow-holts and pasture-lands of Dimplethorpe, so the octopus fixed a black sucker there too, *en route* to the sea, hoping thereby to get a little more nutriment, if the place could be made eligible as a sort of London suburb, conveniently situate between the filth of the metropolis and the health-giving influences of the salt sea spray.

But nothing came of it. For, just as the

line was finished, and the station built, the railway bubble burst. The East Warwickshire Company came to grief, and the London and Cratchley Cliff scheme was abandoned, leaving poor little Dimplethorpe a sort of burlesque of a terminus, at the end of everything and leading to nowhere, and cutting such a ridiculous figure on the Company's railway map, where it looked, as the chairman said, like an apple on the end of a toasting-fork, that the shareholders ground their teeth with mortification every time they looked at it.

Those who were very deeply involved tried to console themselves with the hope that the quiet beauty of the neighbourhood would still make it a favourable place of residence for the London merchants, even though a few feet of broken and melancholy-looking tramway were all the "facilities" it afforded for access to the sea-coast.

But in this, too, they were disappointed. The lord of the manor, and the hale hearty old squires who lived such a comfortable, port-wine drinking life amongst their ancestral elm-trees, were chiefly of the Conservative sort, who kept a tight hold upon the land, and had not yet been driven by stress of evil fortune or unlucky speculation to sell it off in eligible building sites. So Dimplethorpe was left in its simplicity, and the East Warrenshire shareholders dangled their empty purses in despair, and a train strolled leisurely in and out of the station two or three times a day, just to keep up appearances; and once again things were as though railways had never been.

Nay, they were not even so good as that. If the railways had only let it quite alone, Dimplethorpe would have been thankful. For before they spread their black arms all over the country, and did away with the

good old coaching times, it was on the great east high-road, and the first posting-town out of London, too, and great was the traffic through the place, as four fine old-fashioned inns in its one street could testify. To say nothing of the King's mail which passed through twice every day, with much blowing of horns and shouting of little boys, and running to and fro of ostlers in the stable-yard of the "Bull and Crown," that very stable-yard in which you might now almost mow the grass down, so utterly had the place fallen into disuse.

The railway was to blame for the grass in the stable-yard. And it was to blame for a great deal more than that. It had taken away the gentlemen of the hunt, which was a far worse calamity. For the coaching traffic only put money into the inn-keepers' pockets, whilst the people who came for the hunting season spent, and spent freely too,

all over the place, to say nothing of dances and dinner-parties for the gentlefolk, which made Dimplethorpe almost as lively in its own little way as a regular county town.

There was old Sefton, for instance, who used to have his hunting-seat not a couple of miles from the vicarage, and Lady Sefton always came down with him for the season; and wherever my Lady Sefton was, there was sure to be gaiety enough, for my lady was a woman who could never be content unless she had her house full of company; and, as my lord's purse was in proportion to my lady's requirements, there were fine times for the society-loving people of Dimplethorpe.

And in those days the Berry-Fontenoy's came down for the hunt too, with three fine grown-up sons and as many daughters, and took Squire Bentham's house for the season, the Squire always going to Italy with his

wife for the winter. And there were no women in all the county so handsome as the Berry-Fontenoy girls, nor young men so gallant and daring as the lads; and such flirtations as there used to be with the Sefton people and the Saxbys of Dimplethorpe Park, and such getting up of dances and riding-parties, and such pleasant gossip of the engagements that were likely to come of them. Only the weddings, when it went so far as that, which it often did, always took place in London, so that Dimplethorpe never got any benefit from them.

But now Dimplethorpe never got any benefit from anything. For a new line of rail had been opened direct to Crockingford, which was a much more convenient centre for the gentlemen of the hunt, being close to the Marquis of Softland's place, where the hounds were kept. So little by



little the scarlet deserted Dimplethorpe, the Berry-Fontenoy's going first, and the rest of the people following, because, as they said, there was no fun without the ladies. And Squire Bentham's hall was shut up for the winter, and the gouty old admiral, who never went out, came to live at the Sefton hunting-seat; and if ever a view halloo was heard near the place at all, it was only if the hounds lost the scent down by the osier flats at the moat side.

The removal of the hunt struck the final blow at Dimplethorpe prosperity. After that, the place looked upon itself as lost, and retired into the simplicity of village life. Nobody came to the market, so the market was given up, or rather died of inanition. Nobody came to the inns, so they were given up too, except the "Bull and Crown," which now was a world too wide for the narrow stream of business which trickled

through it. Nobody needed the shops, so they followed the example of the inn, commerce narrowing itself down until it was almost entirely represented by Mr. Septimus Gale, who was a grocer as regarded his right hand window, a draper as regarded his left, and a miscellaneous dealer as regarded the back premises.

And now, for a good thirty years past, Dimplethorpe had been enjoying as comfortable an after-dinner nap as the laziest of villages could desire, not the most inquisitive of travellers caring to lift so much as a corner of the pocket-handkerchief which, after the failure of the railway and the departure of the hunt, it had put over its face, as it leaned back in its easy-chair to sleep, and dream, and snore through the remainder of its afternoon.

## CHAPTER II.

**B**UT though very few visitors came to Dimplethorpe, for the sufficient reason that there was nothing to do and nobody to see when they got to it, a cosy enough life was still lived there by people who were content to have things as their fathers and mothers had had them in the old times.

If your fine London merchants, who build Queen Anne houses and then do not know where to get proper furniture for them, could but have known about Dimplethorpe! For it was such a treasury of spindly-legged tables, and Chippendale

chairs, and ancient brass fenders, which had descended from father to son, and from son to grandson, and from grandson to great-grandson, through many and many a year, since the days when Beatrix came down the oaken staircase of Castlewood Hall in her high-heeled shoes, and her clocked stockings, and all the rest of her eighteenth century finery.

What quaint, old-fashioned scrutoirs there were, with no end of shining metal work about their locks and handles, metal work which the women polished up on Saturday mornings along with the rest of their kitchen furniture, never thinking how it would have been prized in some fine lady's London drawing-room, if the fine lady could only have heard about it. What dozens and dozens of willow-pattern plates, too, from which the Dimplethorpe Hodges ate their porridge and bacon, but which might

have been framed in velvet and carried off in triumph to the boudoirs of fashion, had a disposing fate located them in Wardour Street, instead of leaving them to shine in unappreciated rows upon the delf-racks of the wives and mothers of the said Dimplethorpe Hodges. What delightful old cupboards of rarest oak and walnut, black and bright with a hundred years of polish, and hiding behind their panelled fronts tit-bits of Chelsea and Derby ware, which a West End connoisseur would have given a purse of gold to lay hands upon. What stores of home-spun linen, guiltless, after fifty years' use, of hole or darn or faulty piece, which lay folded in lavender within the lids of those scrutoirs. What marvellous samplers and "Scripture pieces," whose faded colours and almost mediæval simplicity would have been an artist's delight. What lovely fragments of thread lace and filmy muslin

embroidery lingering round withered throat and cheek of ancient respectability in many a tiny parlour to whose fireside no guest was ever bidden, so little had the lapse of time left to its owner save these faded relics of her youthful days.

And old-fashioned dresses ! Little need to rummage costume-books, or dive into the dust of libraries, if you were wanting to get up private theatricals, and had a friend at Dimplethorpe. People there never seemed to throw anything away. Any number of them, from fifty to a hundred years of age, there you might find them folded away in many an old lady's walnut drawers, with their amusing little short waists and puffy sleeves, and scant skirts and Queen Charlotte flounces, and wonderful pipings and quillings, and bindings and puffings ; from the white silk which the vicar's great-grandmother had worn at her wedding in

George the Second's time, down to the blue dimity bed-gown which Betsy Pinnock went to church in yet, and which was given to her mother out of Dame Margaret Bentham's charity, full seventy years ago. And if you could get blue linen like that now-a-days, either for softness or wear, Betsy would undertake to eat it before your eyes, and she could not go further than that !

Yes, all these things were to be found in Dimplethorpe, even after the railway and the hunt had alike deserted it. But none of them, lace nor linen, Derby china nor Chelsea ware, spindly-legged tables nor Chippendale chairs, brass-mounted scrutoirs nor century-old dresses, were comparable with those which might be seen amongst Miss Burnaby's stores. Miss Burnaby was just upon fifty years of age, and every one of those years, let alone chance visits to London in the season, had been spent in

Dimplethorpe ; and she lived now with old General Burnaby in the Manor House at the upper end of the village, just opposite the rich pasture-lands which were part of Squire Bentham's property.

Squire Bentham was an old man now, a good deal older than Miss Burnaby, and since his wife, the lady who always went to Italy for the winter, died, he had shut himself up and kept no company. It was his ground which some speculators wanted to buy when the East Warrenshire Company projected that new line of rail to the place, the speculators thinking that, when Dimplethorpe was brought within such easy reach of London, a few genteel villa residences, built on that pasturage, might be a paying investment. But the old Squire would none of their gingerbread Gothic, and shook his crutches in the face of the enterprising speculator who dared to hint at such a dis-



grace as Bentham land passing out of the family. However, he was on his last legs now, and, when the young Squire came into the property, he might not be so unwilling to part with a few acres of it. Indeed, some people said that, if he went on much longer as he had been going on for the last half-dozen years, he would be obliged to part with more than a few acres of it, whether he was willing or not.

The Manor House was the prettiest old place imaginable, though its drainage was conducted on very loose principles, and its bed-room chimneys were, one and all, stoppered up with bags of straw, that being the way Miss Burnaby's mother and grandmother, who lived all their lives in the same house, had behaved to them; and Miss Burnaby would not, for all the fresh air that new-fangled notions could give her, have done things other than as her mother

and grandmother had done them before her. The house was tangled over, to the topmost peaks of its many gables, with vine and ivy, through which, in all sorts of unexpected nooks, casement windows, with stone mullions, peeped out. There was a yew-tree of at least three centuries' growth on the north side, and a laurel walk leading up to the front door; and there were box hedges cut into all manner of curious shapes, and the beds were full of sweet old-fashioned English flowers, descendants of those which the Burnabys of a hundred years ago had planted. And there was a terrace in front of the drawing-room window, on which, in summer time, a peacock used to walk up and down, admiring his own tail, or listening respectfully to the words of wisdom uttered by Polly, the General's parrot, who could say anything you liked to teach her.

Miss Burnaby was as pretty as the house she lived in, which was enough praise for anyone. And she was pretty in the same way, too, being tangled over with an ivy-like growth of old-fashioned habits and notions, which only grew stronger for being occasionally clipped and trimmed by her brother, who, having knocked about in his early days over most of the habitable globe, had not only kept himself clear of ivy, but was very fond of tearing it down from other people's property. She had opinions about duty and honour and obedience, sturdy as the yew-tree which guarded her home from the north winds. And, meandering quietly about in the background of her character, were a few harmless old-world prejudices against dissent, liberalism, and progress, which had a certain untoward influence upon her behaviour, though not to the extent of making it to the slightest extent

disagreeable, just as those little peculiarities of drainage and ventilation might have proved a slight drawback to the profitable re-letting of the Manor House, whilst, at the same time, they did not detract in the least from its delightfully picturesque appearance.

And the foremost of these prejudices being against dissent, it rather troubled her, good, kind-hearted woman as she was, that her brother, the General, all she had of kith or kin, would “forgather” so cordially with Mr. Ferguson, the independent minister, even to the extent of taking long walks with him, and asking him over to the Manor House of an evening for a friendly cigar or a rubber of backgammon, after she herself had retired to rest. Not that Mr. Ferguson was in any way obnoxious, except so far as his principles were concerned, for he was a quiet, gentlemanly man, and *did* paint such

lovely pictures in oil, besides understanding about flowers and china, and all that sort of thing, subjects in which the General took no kind of interest whatever. But she could never forget that, if the dissenters had their will, the Church would be disestablished, and the disestablishment of the English Church was always one of the first things which presented itself to her mind in connection with the horrors attendant upon the pouring out of the vials in Revelation. How she came to connect the two things was of no consequence, and she could never account for it, but connected they were, and that indissolubly, and you might have argued with Miss Burnaby until Doomsday without convincing her that Non-conformity was not as bad a thing, only in a different coloured dress, as the scarlet woman of Babylon. And, even if you had worked the thin end of an admission into

her mind about that, you would still have had to convince her that dissent was not radically vulgar, which to a woman brought up as she had been was just as bad as being radically wicked, if not worse.

The General had once or twice said to her that it would only be kind to ask little Audrey Ferguson over to play in the Manor House garden, or to look at the pretty Indian and Chinese things in the Manor House drawing-room. For the child was like her father, quiet, subdued, retiring, with an air of unconscious refinement about her, and melancholy too, as if pressed down by circumstances. A different sort of child altogether from her four sisters, who had more of their mother's side of the family about them. But Miss Burnaby had not as yet been able to bring herself to that. She loved the little grey-eyed girl at a distance, and would occasionally go the length of

giving Mr. Ferguson a sweet biscuit to take home in his pocket for her ; but dissent was not a thing to be encouraged to the extent of letting it play about, in the person of the minister's daughter, on the domains of freehold Conservatism, or allowing it to look at the pretty china and handle the Oriental baubles collected in years gone by, by ancestors who had always stood bravely up for Church and State, and paid their tithes and Easter dues like gentlemen.

So Audrey only got the biscuit, and sometimes she did not even get that. For Mr. Ferguson had a bad memory, and more than once Miss Burnaby's gift lay drying in the pocket of his best coat, which he always wore when he went to see the General, until next Sunday, when Mrs. Ferguson, putting his clean handkerchief ready for service, and examining carefully to see that there were no crumpled-up ones left behind

—for in that case he would be sure to pull them out in the pulpit—lighted upon a collection of fragments far down in the corner of the lining. Which fragments she carefully laid upon a piece of newspaper, and then she took them down to the minister's study, and, breaking in upon him as he was deep in the mysteries of election and free will, asked him if ever any woman in this world was blessed with a husband who required so much looking after as hers.



## CHAPTER III.

“THERE is also a neat place of worship for Independents.”

That was the *raison d'être* of Mr. Ferguson, so far as Dimplethorpe was concerned.

He gave one the impression of not being exactly a successful man, though, so far as outward things went, he had a great deal to be thankful for. And his wife never failed to remind him of his mercies, when his always thoughtful grey eyes looked more thoughtful than usual, or the sighs, which often did duty for conversation on his part.

at the domestic hearth, went below a certain depth of dejection.

Indeed, if William James—Mrs. Ferguson always called her husband by both his names—if William James had had the most serious of crimes upon his mind, he could scarcely have sighed over it more deeply; and, as she said to her cousin Tholthorpe sometimes, it was no wonder his ministrations were not more acceptable to the people, for what could you expect in the way of spiritual comfort or edification from a man who sighed like that? It was as much as allowing that religion was a failure, and, when a man's bread and cheese depended on it, there was no need to go quite so far as that.

But Mr. Ferguson had nothing upon his mind, save that which weighs down many a man who, nevertheless, has to go about his work with a cheerful face: the consciousness

that circumstances, or, still worse, other's misinterpretation of them for him, have forced him into a position for which nature never intended him. Some men, knowing this, can fight with the circumstances and conquer them, and so bring out better things from the mistakes and follies of the past ; but others are so pressed down by the misery of failure that even the longing for success deserts them, and they are content to weary on in the groove to which folly has consigned them, thankful if they can but slip through life without overmuch blame, silently mourning over what might have been, whilst the lesser, but more ignoble possibilities which still remain, slide away unheeded. And amongst these "others" was the Independent minister of Dimplethorpe.

But after all, as success goes, or as other people count it in this world, he had fared

no worse than many men. This was his history :—

His mother was a widow, and he was her only child. When her husband, who was also a minister amongst the Independents, died, she brought her boy to London and settled in a quiet street near the Kensington Art Schools, and took in lodgers. The first who came to her was one of the masters in those schools, and so well she behaved to him, and so comfortable she made him, that he never left her again ; but when he married he brought his bride to her, and there they had lived ever since.

He would have repaid to William Ferguson some of the kindness he had received from the lad's mother. William had a taste for drawing, and was going to the art classes of an evening. Mr. Evans—that was the master's name—thought he discerned in the youth a talent which was worth cultivating,

and he would fain have persuaded his mother to let him be brought up an artist. But Mrs. Ferguson had one desire in life, and that was to see her only son what his father had been before him, a minister amongst the Independents. It was a work which her husband had found sweet and congenial. It had brought him many friends. In it she hoped he had done much good. What better could William do than follow in his father's footsteps?

And indeed it seemed as if he was marked out for that, as much as for anything else. He was quiet, studious, persevering. His mind was full of thoughts and questionings. He was much given to speculations in theology and philosophy. He would argue with people by the hour together on the topics which were agitating his own denomination in those days. These were indications, Mrs. Ferguson thought,

providentially leading him into the path of the ministry.

On the other hand, he was getting on well with his studies at the School of Art. He never seemed to be so happy as when shut up in his own little room at the top of the house, copying, with pre-Raphaelite accuracy, a spray of blackberry, or the rich clusters of fruit and flowers which he picked up in Covent Garden Market. And so much of cloud and sky as he could see from his dormer window in that little room, above the long rows of chimney-stacks, was a joy and delight to him, more even than theological studies or philosophical speculations. This, Mr. Evans thought, pointed to another path than the ministry.

However, the time came when the thing must be decided one way or other, and accident decided it, as accident decides, or seems to decide, so many things which go

to the making or marring of men's lives.

For a friend of Mrs. Ferguson's came to the house, and she told him of her difficulties, and he advised her to write to the Principal of one of the Independent Colleges. And the Principal happened to be passing through London just at that time, and had a talk with young Ferguson, the result of which talk was that his mother decided to send him to Walnut College as a theological student. Probably, if the head master of the School of Art had happened to call instead, and have a talk with William, the result would have been entirely different, as William himself said to his mother, not feeling quite sure about the matter in his own mind. But his mother said these things did not go by chance. And, with just a pang as he looked his last upon the little room where he had copied the blackberries and lilies, William Ferguson

started to commence his training for the ministry.

And really it did seem as if the right path had been chosen for him. He applied himself with such success to every subject required, and built up such a reputation for steadiness, originality, and perseverance, that when the Dimplethorpe minister fell ill, and the Dimplethorpe deacons wrote to the Principal of Walnut College, asking him to send down a young man, to act for a few Sundays, until poor Mr. Miller made up his mind whether he would get better or die, William Ferguson, who had just then completed a three years' course of divinity, was sent to the vacant post, the professors, one and all, saying there was no one else in the college whom they could so confidently recommend, as possessing at once the talent and self-respect needed for such a position.



So he went. Two or three months later Mr. Miller died. The congregation liked Mr. Ferguson so well that they offered him the vacant pulpit. After due consultation with his friends and the professors, he accepted it, everyone saying what a fine opening it was for him. Most young men, they remarked, had to wait for years before they found themselves settled over a suitable congregation; and here was he, at two and twenty, with a place prepared for him, and success assured, if he only went on as he had begun. If Mrs. Ferguson wanted any other assurance that she had chosen the right path for her son, she had it now, and, with tears in her eyes, she thanked God for all His goodness to them both.

William took to the old minister's house next door to the chapel, standing a little way back from the street. It had a big rambling garden behind, stretching down to

the moat which surrounded the ruins of the castle, and from that the place took its name of the Moat House. It was the very house for a young man who wanted to be much alone, to think and reflect, and shape out plans and purposes for the future; and in it William might have lived a comfortable life enough, preparing his sermons in the roomy old study at the back, with its big bow-window opening into the somewhat untidy garden; or pacing up and down the path by the moat-side, where the daffodils and flag-flowers made such a golden splendour in springtime; or perhaps doing a bit of sketching now and then, for his early tastes still clung to him, and the pleasant woodland beauty of Dimplethorpe gave him better subjects for a picture than even Covent Garden could afford. And there the future might have unfolded itself at leisure, and what the young student had to say

might have been said to purpose, when it had had time to ripen in the sunshine of reflection.

But the congregation were unanimous in their opinion about one thing. They said it was a shame their minister should occupy a house like that, all by himself, and spend so much time mooning up and down that reedy path by the moat-side, as he would be sure to spend if he had no one to shake him up. He ought to marry. That was just what he ought to do.

It was old Deacon Polson who said this to him first. And, as Deacon Polson had neither chick nor child belonging to him, he could not be suspected of sinister motives in saying it. There were two ways of marrying a wife, the old deacon said. The first way was to be quite sure that a wife was a good thing, and that you wanted one; and then to look about, steadily and

industriously, until you found the right one, making up your mind beforehand as to the qualities which were necessary in the lady. Those qualities were religion, good temper, health, and an active disposition. If in addition the lady had good looks and a little money, all the better; but if not, and she had the other qualities, it would be wise to secure her.

The second way was to devote yourself to your work, and think nothing about matrimony, until you drifted into it by accident. Of course, in that case it *was* an accident, and, whether you were happy in it or not, was an accident too. Whereas, in the other case, you had had your own reason to guide you, unfettered, to begin with, by partialities of any kind, and therefore you were much more likely to make a suitable choice. And if, as Mr. Ferguson admitted, he had no partialities at the

present time, he was, by all good logic, in precisely the right state of mind to do well for himself, common sense having room to work, as it seldom had in such cases.

Deacon Polson said this as they sat together in that bow-windowed study, William Ferguson watching the white clouds drift past behind the ruins of the castle keep, and wishing that his duties as pastor of the Dimplethorpe congregation would allow him a little more time for painting pictures in oil, to say nothing of those other pictures which a young man naturally likes to paint upon the canvas of the future, and from which gleams out the sweet face, be it fair or be it dark, of

“That not impossible she,  
Who shall command my heart and me.”

He was rather given to following the guidance of other people in matters that touched his own daily life. Otherwise, Mrs.

Ferguson and the Principal of Walnut College would not have had so much weight in deciding the course of that life. And, having begun to let other people decide for him, it was easy to go on, so long as he kept what, after all, was his real true life, that interior one of thought and speculation, free. It would, perhaps, be better, for the sake of the congregation, that he should marry. It would save him at any rate from many little annoyances which beset the path of a single and eligible man, and it would increase his opportunities of usefulness amongst the people.

Having been brought into that frame of mind, it was easy to dwell in imagination upon first one young lady and then another, who might turn out to be the wife for him, though as yet he had no special preference. And that stage being reached, and old Deacon Polson representing to him now

and then the advantages of the first theory of matrimony, the looking steadily for a wife until you found one, it was easier still, when one particular young lady crossed his path more frequently than the rest, to think about her as the companion destined by a disposing Providence to advance his usefulness in that state of life to which he had been appointed.

That young lady happened to be Miss Priscilla Cardwell, only daughter of a widow in the congregation. And as Priscilla herself was quite ready to be thought about, there were no difficulties to be overcome in that direction. She was a brisk, active, practical, wide-awake young lady, considerably more wide-awake than the minister, and troubled with none of that maidenly hesitation which stays the footsteps of girls sometimes as they near the shoals and quicksands of womanhood. She

meant to be married some time, of course, and to be a minister's wife was her ideal of such importance as was likely to fall to her lot. Besides, she did feel a little drawn to Mr. Ferguson, as very practical natures sometimes do towards those of more meditative mould; and the thought of winning his affection and marrying him, and then looking after him and keeping him straight in a general way, presented itself to her with just as much of romance as was necessary to smooth over the rigid outlines of her character, and make her appear sufficiently feminine in the eyes of a man who, whatever else he needed in a wife, would certainly think of her primarily as something to be loved and taken care of.

So the end of it was that, within a year of his settlement at Dimplethorpe, there was a somewhat fussy wedding from Mrs. Cardwell's house, after which Mr. and Mrs.



William James Ferguson went to the sea-side for a fortnight. And during their absence Mrs. Cardwell, who was quite as practical and energetic as her daughter, took possession of the Moat House, and superintended the doing of it up from top to bottom, Mrs. Ferguson senior not apparently taking so much interest in her son's domestic arrangements as might have been expected.

Indeed, Mrs. Cardwell said to her niece, Mrs. Tholthorpe, Priscilla's bosom friend, and herself married to a minister up in the north, she believed, if Mrs. Ferguson could have had her own way, that wedding would never have happened at all. For she was rather a high-minded old lady, and wanted something out of the common way for her son; and had even advised him, when she heard that there was a probability of his becoming engaged, to wait a few years until

his opinions had had time to mature. Young men, she said, sometimes made great mistakes by committing themselves to engagements before they really knew their own minds, and then, when it was too late, they were unable to draw back.

Sly, designing old woman! But Mrs. Cardwell knew what it all meant. She wanted to come and keep house for Mr. Ferguson herself, and have a sort of position in the place, instead of slaving with lodgers in one of those dreary London back streets. However, Priscilla's mother had been too many for her. As if a marriage of the purest affection, as her daughter's and William James's was, should be set aside in order that the young man might have time to look about him, and pick up some one with a fortune, some one who had connections, and, therefore, could help him on a little

more in a worldly point of view. Such meanness!

And on the very Sunday morning on which Priscilla, in all the splendour of bridal raiment, made her appearance in the minister's pew as the minister's wife, Mrs. Cardwell said to her,

“Now, Priscilla, my dear, I wish you to behave with the utmost respect to your mother-in-law, but, at the same time, you must remember that, if she could have had her own way, you would never have been William James's wife. Bear that in mind, and hold your own. I have no wish to see a daughter of mine trodden upon by her husband's relations.”

With which excellent piece of parental advice young Mrs. Ferguson commenced her married life.

## CHAPTER IV.

AND she was a good wife, too, if careful housekeeping had been all that a husband like William Ferguson needed. For there was no place in the village—Dimplethorpe was always called a village now, spite of the “Gazetteer”—more spotlessly clean than that old house next door to the chapel, nor any blinds that drew up so straight as Mrs. Ferguson’s, nor any curtains that fell in such perpendicular lines, nor any grates so black, nor fire-aprons so white, nor any chimneys so carefully stopped up from descent of soot or fresh air, nor any family where order ruled with such a rod of iron,

and where everything and everybody, including the husband himself, found it expedient to submit with such unquestioning obedience to the managing genius of the establishment.

Yes, a capital minister's wife, said those who could not see just where the shoe pinched. Mr. Ferguson might have sought far and wide before he had found anyone so completely fitted in every way to advance his interests. Always looking after something, either her house, or her husband, or her children, or her servants, or the members of the congregation. Indeed, in the last department, she was a wonderful helpmeet for her husband, he being, poor dear man, with all his good qualities, not much of a visitor, partly, perhaps, on account of his intellectual capacities, which the Dimplethorpe Independents had found out to be of a decidedly superior order, in fact almost

beyond their own powers of appreciation, though, for that very reason, they had a sort of pride in having such a man amongst them.

Really he was almost too clever. Always taken up with speculations and new books. Mrs. Cardwell said, if he had not been blessed with such a wife as Priscilla, there was no telling what might have become of them all. For before Mr. Ferguson had been married eight years, he found himself the father of five daughters, the youngest twins, and all of them as bright, happy, good-looking little people—Audrey, the eldest, perhaps excepted—as anyone need wish to see, but requiring a vast amount of management on their mother's part to keep them properly fed and clothed, to say nothing of any provision for the future, out of the modest stipend which had seemed so abund-

ant when the young couple first set up housekeeping.

Mr. Ferguson toiled hard at his sermons. He also made a few ineffectual attempts at writing for the magazines. But he said nothing to anybody, not even to Mr. Polson, the wealthiest and most despotic of his deacons, about the difficulty which he found in making both ends meet. He had been very foolish. He was feeling that now, in more ways than one. Priscilla was not a woman who wanted loving and caring for. Still less was she a woman who could sympathise with philosophy and picture-painting. He was a great deal more lonely now than he had been before he was married, because then he could ramble about in the garden, and think his own thoughts, whereas now he had to think the thoughts of his wife, and those thoughts turned upon

nothing but how to manage the family and the congregation.

The family, on a hundred and fifty pounds a year, was the great difficulty. Mr. Ferguson was a great deal too proud to say anything about that, but Priscilla had no such foolish scruples. She mentioned the subject over and over again, and mentioned it in the right quarters, too, with such tact and prudence that, at a church meeting which was held nine years after Mr. Ferguson's settlement over the congregation, his stipend was increased by fifty pounds, bringing it up to exactly two hundred a year, not too much, the deacons thought, for a clever man with a wife and five growing-up children.

That extra fifty pounds a year released Priscilla's shoulders from many a burden, but it added others, heavier to bear, to the sensitive mind of her husband. For when



a congregation has done that sort of thing for its pastor, it naturally expects to be called upon, and petted, and paid attention to in return. And that was the hardest work of all for Mr. Ferguson. He never had been active in visiting his flock, except the poor, and sick, and needy members of it. He could preach subtle and speculative sermons. He could be gentle with those in distress, and faithful with those who were falling into sin. People said that, when he baptised their little children, he held them in his arms with more than a mother's tenderness, and his grey eyes bent over them with looks of untold love and pity. And for those who were mourning their dead, where was there anyone who could comfort them like Mr. Ferguson? But, taken generally, he was not what they could call a good visitor. He could not drop in and take a cigar and have a comfortable chat about

church affairs. He showed no particular interest in the price Mr. Tewksby of the Moat Farm was likely to get for his corn at the next Crockingford fair, and it was evidently a matter of quite minor importance to him whether Mrs. Tewksby sent her chickens to London at three and tenpence a couple, or whether those miserly poultry dealers beat her down, as they so often tried to do, to a guinea a dozen. Of course that sort of thing vexed unimaginative people, for whom the buyings and sellings of their own daily lives were all important. If a minister out of the pulpit had no interest in corn, bullocks, and poultry, what use was he to the agricultural part of his congregation? And if he never troubled himself about how shares were going up or down, what communion of spirit *could* a man like Deacon Polson, however much he wished it, hold with him? The thing

was clearly impossible. And the fact that he *did* know every week exactly how much poor old Betsy Clershaw got for *her* butter and eggs, Betsy who never gave a threepenny bit to the collections, and that he could have told you to a penny what blind old Jack Hardy earned in a day at basket-making, only made the case worse against him, for it showed that he *had* a mind for such things when he chose.

No, Mr. Ferguson was not a good visitor. Mr. Polson himself, than whom no one expected, or had a right to, more attention from the minister, had been for weeks together unblessed by that minister's presence, save as he had obtained it by an express invitation to tea or supper. Mr. and Mrs. Tewksby of the Moat Farm—though Mr. Tewksby might, if he had chosen it, have been parish churchwarden any time these ten years past, and only was not because he liked an active,

stirring ministry, such as they got amongst the Independents—had not seen Mr. Ferguson inside his doors for the last three months, and he was beginning to speak his mind about it pretty freely. And not only about that, but about the sermons too. For Mr. Ferguson was too much upon speculations. What he, Mr. Tewksby, wanted, was an active, stirring ministry and an anecdotal style, whereas Mr. Ferguson, from one year's end to another, never told his congregation an anecdote at all, and that made his preaching fall flat. If one could not get that sort of thing amongst the Independents, one might as well go to the church and be a parish warden at once. There would be a sort of dignity in that.

Only Mrs. Tewksby clung to the chapel. For she liked a front pew, and to be shown into it with proper respect, and to have the officiating deacon leave his place at the

table and come out to show her the hymn, if, as was sometimes the case, she failed to catch the number. She might fail to catch the number often enough at church before anyone would do as much for her there. And her cough might be as troublesome as it liked, even to the extent of compelling her to get up and go out of church altogether, before the clergyman's wife would think of calling next day to inquire after her, as Mrs. Ferguson always did, if she had a worse fit than usual. That calling kept Mrs. Tewksby faithful. Else there was no saying what might have happened. But indeed, unless the minister stirred himself up, and attended to his pastoral duties a little more diligently, there was no telling, even with all his wife's supplementary offices, what might happen.

## CHAPTER V.

MRS. FERGUSON used to talk these matters over with her husband sometimes of an evening, after the younger children had gone to bed, and Audrey amused herself with a pencil and paper in some quiet corner of the room. And, as she said it, she would fling back her cap-strings with an impatient gesture which had become habitual since the sense of Mr. Ferguson's pastoral shortcomings had dawned upon her; and then she would renew her attack upon a seemingly impregnable fortress of little socks and pinafores, for with five children, and four out of the five blessed

with any amount of health and spirits, it was as much as one pair of hands could do to keep the mending in check.

Sometimes her husband, in a jesting manner, which, under the circumstances, was little short of insult, would compare this fortification of socks and pinafores and petticoats to the walls and towers of Troy, and Mrs. Ferguson's efforts to those of the Greeks under Achilles. Mrs. Ferguson had never heard of the siege of Troy, nor how it ended, nor why it was undertaken; but that her long, patient hours of darning and mending could be looked upon with other than the silent respect which they so richly deserved, was, to say the least of it, aggravating.

"Yes, it is all very well for you, William James, when you have nothing to do from morning to night but saunter about and amuse yourself."

This was aggravating, too, as he had been nearly the whole of that day trying to tone down a rather speculative sermon, so as to make it coincide with the practical tendencies of his congregation. But he said nothing. Mr. Ferguson had got into the habit of saying nothing now, and his wife went on.

“Yes, nothing to do but saunter about and amuse yourself; but I *do* say it is too bad of you to pour ridicule on those who try to employ their time to a little more profit. I should like to see where the poor children would be, if I took things as easily as you take them.”

“My dear, I was not ridiculing you. Nothing was farther than that from my thoughts. I only meant to say that your efforts to reduce that pile of unmended articles resembled those of the ancient Greeks on the Trojan plains. They appear-



ed hopeless, but, in the end, indomitable skill and bravery carried the day. And I have no doubt it will be so with you."

"Then, William James, I wish you would say what you mean, so that I could not misunderstand you. I am happy to say that I was never brought up to know anything about Troy, but only to make myself useful in a house, which I do to the best of my ability."

"Nobody more so, Priscilla."

Priscilla was not quite sure how to take that. It might be uttered in the spirit of humility, or again, it might only be that nasty teasing way which her husband had. Probably it was only the teasing way, and William James must be put down. If a woman who did her duty to her family could not speak her mind, it was a pity.

"Yes, William James," she said, with dignity, "it is done to the best of my ability,

and it is a good thing for the children that I am able to do it, for I am sure, with your going about so little amongst the congregation now, there is no telling what may happen to us before long."

"Priscilla, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"Sufficient? Yes, I should say it was more than sufficient, especially when you have to manage everything and think for everybody. There never was a man with better prospects than you had, William James, when we were first married. The congregation would have done anything in the world for you, if you had only humoured them a little."

"My dear, it is not what the congregation does for the minister, it is what the minister can do for his congregation; that is the important question."

"Begging your pardon, William James,

it is nothing of the sort. You are bound to act so that the congregation shall respect and uphold you."

"I am bound to act as an honest man, Priscilla."

"Of course you are; and you are bound to earn a comfortable living for your wife and children by doing so. If you had spent half the time in visiting that you spend in painting those foolish pictures, it would have been a hundred a year, and not fifty, that the congregation would have raised us, and then think how differently we might have lived."

"I neither have, nor ask, nor want," said the minister.

"No," replied his wife; "and if you could live upon neither having, nor asking, nor wanting, it would be all very well to leave things in that way. But when it comes to five children under eight years

old, and the income only two hundred, and expenses increasing as they do every year, you are not likely to *have* much unless you do ask a little more industriously than you have been doing lately. And as for wanting, *you* may not, but I am sure the children will before long."

And, having thus demolished her husband's position, Mrs. Ferguson hurled down another of the battlements of Troy in the shape of a little pinafore, which she energetically turned inside out, shook, held up to the light, folded, and then consigned to the basket of completed articles.

"I don't want to be unreasonable, William James," she continued, "but a woman has her feelings about things, especially when she is the mother of a family."

"My dear, what can I do?" said Mr. Ferguson, helplessly.

"Do? Why, you might make yourself

more generally acceptable amongst the members. There are some of the leading people that haven't seen you inside their doors for a month past. Mr. Tewksby, for instance."

"Priscilla, why should I put myself out of the way to go and see Mr. Tewksby? He is rich and increased with goods, and has need of nothing; certainly not of my company. Have I neglected any of the members who are poor or in trouble?"

Mrs. Ferguson shook herself impatiently, and bustled to the window to straighten the blinds, upsetting Audrey on her way, who meekly picked herself up and went into a more retired corner. Then Mrs. Ferguson began to re-arrange the fire-irons, a favourite occupation when anything put her out, for she could make as much noise over it as she pleased. What *could* one do with a man who was so utterly devoid of common

sense that he only went amongst his people when they were poor or in trouble?

After a great deal of unnecessary rattling she seated herself, gave her capstrings a fling, and pursued her work in dignified silence, a hint to her husband that he might consider the conversation at an end.

He took it as such. With a sigh that was more aggravating in its hopelessness than anything he could have said by way of contradiction, he got up, stretched himself, and walked wearily out of the room, saying, as he passed the meek little girl, who was huddled up in the corner with her pencil and paper,

“Come along, Audrey!”

## CHAPTER VI.

HE put the child's hat on and took her for a walk amongst the osier flats on the lower side of the village.

Very few people ever went there at all, and that was the reason Mr. Ferguson went so often, for he could stroll up and down with his hands behind him, and meditate as long as he liked, without fear of meeting anybody except the basketmakers who were gathering osiers. Whilst he meditated, Audrey would ramble about amongst the long grass, gathering bunches of Lent lilies, if it was the season for them, and, if not,

watching the osier-gatherers as they worked away amongst the silver willows. For what trade lingered at all in the place now was that of basket-making, the fisher-people on the east coast getting most of their crab and lobster-pots from Dimplethorpe.

This evening, towards the middle of a cool May, there were plenty of daffodils, and not many osier-boys, their work being done better in the morning; so little Audrey was soon wading about to her heart's content, knee-deep amongst the golden blossoms, whilst her father, his hands loosely folded behind him as usual, was trying to forget, in some train of speculative inquiry, the vexing and not impertinent questions which his wife had just been raising.

As he strolled along he caught sight of a lad, squatted down with his back to an old willow stump, apparently absorbed in reading; and, as he came nearer, he found



that it was Phil Hathaway, the grandson of old Ben Hathaway the basket-maker.

Mr. Ferguson had never spoken to Phil, but he knew the lad well enough, for he had seen him many a time in the early mornings gathering osiers amongst the daffodil beds. And not gathering them very industriously either; for if there chanced to be a stormier sky than usual, or if the white clouds were drifting in fantastic wreaths before the west wind, or if the early morning sunshine were bathing in its pale golden haze the distant hills of Warrenshire, Phil would stand for a quarter of an hour together with his back to that willow stump, his face towards the rugged old castle keep, the osiers dropping from his hands. And then he would pull a bit of paper out of his pocket and stoop down over it, as if writing.

Poetry maybe, for it was possible the lad

thought himself a genius. He was untidy enough for one, at any rate ; for though, in a general way, Phil kept his face and hands clean, his clothes looked as if they had been pitchforked on to him, and, whatever else the village barber made a profit by, he certainly did not make it by cutting Phil's hair. And Phil thought he had a talent for writing, did he ? Mr. Ferguson was sorry for him. Better keep to the willow wands and turn them into good useful lobster-pots, than follow the will-o'-the-wisp of literature, which would only land him in a swamp and leave him there. Mr. Ferguson had piles of returned magazine articles lying in his own desk at home, and he knew only too well how that sort of thing generally turns out ; a little hope, a great deal of disappointment ; foolish pride if one thing out of fifty proves a success, wear-

ness and dejection over the forty and nine upon which such waste of paper and pocket-money have been spent. And he determined to find out the lad and tell him what he knew.

Phil was an overgrown boy of thirteen or fourteen. He lived with his grandfather old Ben Hathaway, in a cottage a little way down a lane turning off from the vicarage. When Phil was almost a baby, his father had been found drowned in the moat. Some people said he had done it himself, others said it had been done for him. The jury said it was accidental, and returned a verdict to that effect. But there was, nevertheless, an uncomfortable feeling about it, so much so that people kept away from that part of the moat on dark nights. Phil's mother took her little boy then to live with his grandfather, and they were all comfortable enough for a

year or two, until she died, too, and Ben was left to be father and mother and everything to the lad.

So it was rather a queer upbringing that he had, there in the old basket-maker's cottage, and people said that was the reason he never looked like other boys. He had no women folk to pet him, or hear him say his prayers, or to put a bit of white collar round his long neck on Sundays, or to push the straight black hair off his forehead, and look lovingly into the depths of the shy brown eyes which shone through their dark lashes underneath it. And though Phil's grandfather was parish clerk, Phil scarcely ever saw the inside of the church, except when it was being cleaned; for, owing to the absence of white collar, he never looked tidy enough even to sit with the Sunday-school boys, much less stand up by old Ben's side to make responses in the pew under

the pulpit, which was right in front of all the respectable families. So, instead of going to church, Phil used to take an old prayer-book, of which his grandfather, as clerk, always had plenty, and saunter away amongst the osier flats, and draw pictures on the blank leaves of it, just as he was doing that Wednesday evening when Mrs. Ferguson spoke her mind about the congregation being visited more efficiently.

For when the minister got near enough—and he need not have been afraid of disturbing him, for the lad was far too absorbed in his work to hear a footfall on the long green grass—he found Phil making a sketch of the ruined castle, which could be seen from the osier flats, with the big, ragged elm-trees clustered round its keep, on the north side of the moat.

Not poetry, then. And he had wronged the boy in thinking that at fourteen he was

hankering after the magazines, instead of pulling willows for his grandfather on the Dimplethorpe marshes. True, it was only a rude attempt, with an end of penny pencil, on the thumbled leaf of an old prayer-book ; but the boy had got the feeling of his subject, and was expressing that feeling with an earnestness and power which only wanted guiding to become true art.

Mr. Ferguson forgot about speculative inquiries, and domestic difficulties too, as he watched the lad's efforts. If that boy could but give his life to what he was doing now, instead of wasting it amongst the osier flats. Or if he could only learn enough of art to make it sweeten the daily toil of such a career as lay before him there, amongst the rude village folk of Dimplethorpe.

Suddenly Phil pushed the hair out of his eyes, and gave himself an impatient shake.

“What’s the use? Why can’t one make other folks see what one sees oneself?”

Mr. Ferguson came round in front of the lad and put his hands on his shoulders, and, looking down into his face with a more comforting sense of companionship than he had had with anyone in Dimplethorpe during all the ten years of his life there, said,

“Because, Phil, if we could do that, there would be nothing else to long after.”

Phil looked quietly up now; he neither started nor seemed astonished. Only there was a quaint smile upon his lips as he said,

“What for, sir, did you say that to me, as if I had been a gentleman?”

“Because I believe you are one, Phil,” said the minister.

And with that he sat down by the boy’s side, and they were friends.

He soon found out why Phil got on so badly with the willow-weaving. The lad had the make of an artist in him, not merely in the use of his eyes and fingers, but in that poetical feeling for Nature, that sympathy with her in her ever-varying moods, which everyone must have who would win from her what she has to give, and tell it to others either by pen, chisel, brush, or pencil.

Only he wanted some one to teach him the grammar of this speech. There was the beauty speaking from without to the boy's soul, and he was longing to shape it into actual form, to make other people see what he saw himself. If he could but find his way to that, what a new life would open before him ! What a rest this new gift of speech would be from the drudgery of the mere handicraft which was his inherited portion !



And an idea came into the minister's mind, as he sat talking with Phil amongst the osier and daffodil beds. He would at last be of some use in the world. This talk talk, Sunday after Sunday, this watering down of every noble thought which came to him, to the common-place thinness which his congregation had decided was best for their intellectual digestions, what did it lead to? What was it all worth? It brought his wife and children a living, and he must go on with it; but, for himself, it was a hollowness, if not a lie. He was not telling them great truths in simple words; that would have been well enough; but he was telling them no truth at all in fine words, and the finer the words were, the less the people cared to have any truth in them. But here, away from all the windy waste of breath, was at least one good work which he could do. Without taking this boy

out of the track which he had been born to, and in which he was to find his livelihood, he could at any rate put into his hands the means of brightening all his toil, if not at last of lifting him away from it.

He would have Phil to his house two or three times a week, and teach him what he knew himself of painting. His own technical skill was not much, but his love for art was genuine, and that would help him to help Phil. And if he found that the lad really had not only a gift in that line, but energy and perseverance enough to work it out, some way might chance of giving him a definite art-training in London.

“Have you any drawings at home, Phil?”

“Yes, sir, a good many.”

“May I come and see them some day?”

“If you please, sir,” said Phil, as quietly as if it had only been bundles of osiers

that Mr. Ferguson was inquiring after.

“When, Phil?”

“Any time, sir; I’m mostly in all day, after I have gathered the osiers of a morning.”

“Then shall I come to-morrow?”

“If you please, sir; I’ll just tell grandfather first, or he might wonder about it.”

“All right then, Phil, I’ll come to-morrow.”

And with that Mr. Ferguson came away, feeling more like a man than he had done for many a month past.

Strange that it never occurred to him to ask himself whether Priscilla would object to Phil’s lessons at the Moat House. And even if she had done so, there was probably vigour and determination enough in the heart of him, now that he had really entered into the spirit of his work, to put her back into her right position with the

same strong hand which he was reaching out to help Phil.

“Come along, Audrey.”

And the child, who had been gathering daffodils all the time, came up and put her hand into his, and they went home together.

## CHAPTER VII.

NEXT day Mr. Ferguson, according to promise, went to see Phil's pictures.

Old Ben Hathaway's cottage was as pretty in its way as the Manor House. Summer and winter it was green with ivy, but in June time one could scarcely see the greenness for the roses and honeysuckles which contended with each other which should climb highest over its little lattice windows. Ben was admirably adapted for setting off the beauty of his residence, being as ugly an old man as you might find in a summer day's journey. He had shaggy eye-

brows, which almost hid the little fiery black eyes underneath, and his front teeth came out like tusks, and he only shaved once in a week, on Saturday evenings, to be ready for church next day. Therefore, this being Thursday, the beardy part of his face—and for Ben that part was nearly the whole of it—presented somewhat the appearance of one of Mrs. Ferguson's half-worn blacklead brushes. At least, that was the idea it first suggested to little Audrey, as, tightly holding her father's hand, and keeping well behind him, the two made their way through the bundles of baskets in all stages of progress, which cumbered the front yard.

Ben might look dirty, but he was as clean as a new pin, and so was his cottage, though he and Phil had all the scouring of it to do between them, it being one of Ben's cranks that he would not have any "women folk knocking round" about him. Another of

his cranks was ventilation. Summer and winter alike, he slept with his bed-room window open, a thing unheard of in Dimplethorpe, and so entirely beyond the limits of propriety that the villagers never failed to use it as a clinching pin for their arguments, when, as was not unfrequently the case, they wished to prove that Ben "was a bit touched in the upper story." As if anybody in his right senses would ever go to bed without seeing that everything in his house which *could* fasten was fastened down as tight as bolt and lock and hasp could make it. Not for fear of thieves, thank goodness, they had none of them in Dimplethorpe, but just because that was the way things ought to be done.

From the little kitchen where Ben attended to his domestic affairs, a very rickety stair, with no two of its steps exactly of the same height, led into a long low room

in the roof, with a window at each of its gable ends. One of these windows looked away over the osier flats to Dimplethorpe Castle, and beyond that to the soft grey sweep of the Warrenshire hills. This was Phil's room, where, when he had done his daily stint of basket-work, he could spend the rest of his time as he liked.

"You'll find him up there," said Ben, stripping a foam of soap-suds from his hairy arms, to point in the direction of the rickety stairway. "He's mostly up there when he isn't at the willow-peeling. And," he continued, as the minister was groping his way up, "perhaps you'd best take the little one along with you. She'll be kind o' scared down among these here things."

But Audrey had settled that for herself, being in far too much terror of the old man's shaggy brows and carnivorous-looking teeth to risk remaining downstairs in his sole



company. She was scrambling as well as she could after her father, who was now nearly out of sight up the dark rift. His head generally held but one thought at a time, and now that thought was how he could best help Phil up the hill difficulty of art; so that poor little Audrey, toiling up her own special hill difficulty of Ben Hathaway's rickety stair, was having a hard time of it. Not until the sound of successive stumbles, and a small piping cry for help reached him, did he remember that he had brought the child with him at all.

But Phil had heard first, and, running to the top of the stair, he caught sight of a fair little head down amongst the darkness; then a little hand stretched out for help, which he caught and so brought its owner safe to land.

"And I have come too," said the tiny maiden, with an inquiring glance towards

her father to know if she had done right.

“The man downstairs has such big teeth!”

And then she deposited her blue sash, which had come off as she scrambled up the stairs, on a bundle of osiers in one corner, and, seating herself on another, she remained as still as a mouse all the rest of the time. Even Mrs. Ferguson, who thought less of Audrey than of any of her other children, was bound to confess that you might always trust Audrey to sit still. She could do that, whatever else she could not do.

Mr. Ferguson looked over Phil's scraps of drawings, and found promise enough in them to justify the plans he had made for helping the boy. Before he came away, old Ben was called up, Audrey drawing cautiously back behind the osiers as the blacking brush of a face loomed up through the gloom of the stairway, and it was arranged that Phil should go to the minister's house

three times a week, for a couple of hours a time, and have such instruction there as the minister could give him.

“He’ll be no worse a basket-maker, Ben,” said Mr. Ferguson, tentatively, not being quite sure how the old man might take to such a disposition of his grandson’s time—“no worse a basket-maker for knowing how to make a picture. And if he’s worth as much as I think he is, you’ll get ten times more willow-peeling out of him now than you’ve ever got before. Will that do?”

“Thank you kindly, sir,” said the old man; “I’ve no doubt but what you’re doing a good turn by him. I don’t know as he’ll ever make much out of yon scraps of paper, as he’s always a fidgeting over ’em, but it isn’t nothing to me as long as the willows is peeled. It’s what he’s got to do, is peeling the willows, and when it’s done I haven’t nothing no more to do with it. But I’m

obliged to you all the same, sir, every bit."

"Then you'll let him come, Ben."

"Oh, yes, sir, and welcome. It isn't much he can do when the willows is done. I don't ever let him clean up the kitchen, because it's more work he makes than what he does, and it's no odds to me whether he's agate with his pictures up here, or along with you, sir, so long as the osiers is ready. It won't be me, sir, as will complain about anything."

Phil said not a word, but he was trembling all over with joy. It was as if he had suddenly awakened and found the brightest dream he had ever dreamed, a brighter reality. If he had never peeled osiers before with a will, he would do it now. And in that determination, humble as it seemed, Phil made his first step towards success.

With a bundle of drawings under his arm, to examine leisurely at home, Mr. Ferguson took his departure, again oblivious of poor little Audrey, who stood there at the top of the stairs, looking down into their apparently bottomless depths of gloom, as Eurydice might have gazed into those of Hades before she made up her mind to follow Orpheus. And the old church clerk looked so very dreadful, and her father was quite out of sight now. Her lip began to tremble. With a brave effort she caught hold of a bunch of osiers, and, planting one small foot on the top of the stair, timidly stretched down the other in search of a landing-place, she knew not where. Only she must get down somehow.

“Shall I carry you, little girl?” said Phil.

With the greatest alacrity, Audrey brought the wandering foot up again, and caught hold of Phil instead of the osiers. When

he had carried her safely downstairs, she put up her little face to be kissed. Phil did not understand.

“I want to kiss you, please,” she said, standing on tip-toe. And how bonnie she looked, with the sunlight all over her fair hair! Phil just touched his lips with a curl of it, but that was not what Audrey wanted.

“Please kiss me properly. That is not how papa kisses me.”

Phil did as he was bid, and then, with just one quick glance towards old Ben, who was lumbering down the stairs, Audrey ran after her father.

Phil found the blue sash when he went back to his pictures, and folded it carefully up. But he never knew what a scolding poor Audrey got from her mother for leaving it behind.

## CHAPTER VIII.

OF course Priscilla *did* object, and that vehemently.

Did William James think she was going to have boys of that kind coming to the house and carrying the dirt upstairs on their boots, and shuffling their feet about on the study carpet? If William James did, he was very much mistaken, for she was going to have nothing of the sort. If Phil Hathaway was so very clever, let the vicar find it out. His grandfather was parish clerk, and, therefore, if he had any talent, the church ought to help it forward, not the

Dimplethorpe Independent minister. But she would pass her word for it, the Rev. Mr. Laxby had never so much as given the boy a thought. And no need. Better let him stick to his basket-making, which would at any rate put bread and cheese into his mouth, and keep the shuffling of dirty boots from her study carpet.

Or if boys of that sort *must* be put forward, let Mr. Ferguson seek them out and find them amongst his own congregation. There were doubtless enough of them and to spare amongst the poorer members, if he would only try to find them. Old Betsy Clershaw had a grandson who could cut out tissue paper lamp-shades with his thumb nail, to look almost as well as if they had been done with scissors; *that* was cleverness and perseverance, if you liked. A boy who always kept himself clean and tidy, and came



to chapel in a nice white collar on Sundays, and would sit quietly on his mother's doorstep all through his holiday afternoons, cutting tissue paper into pretty patterns with his thumb nail, instead of roaming about at a loose end with the ragged village lads, really deserved encouraging, and if William James would have taken *him* up, it would have been a stone in the other pocket against his shortcomings in the way of visiting about amongst the richer members of the congregation. Though she would not have seen Reuben Clershaw, tidy as he was in a general way, coming to the house in his thick boots and treading about on her carpets; they wore out quickly enough with the wear and tear of five children. But Phil Hathaway, the very pick of the village for looking like a scarecrow. And not in any way connected with the chapel

either. No, things had not quite come to such a pass as that, she was thankful to say.

“You can just send word to him, William James, and tell him that you have changed your mind. I daresay it won’t make any difference to him.”

But who shall even begin to imagine the astonishment of Mrs. Ferguson when her husband quietly told her that he had no intention whatever of changing his mind.

“Priscilla, I mean to have that boy come to me three afternoons in every week, and stay for a couple of hours each time. You need not say anything, for I have quite made up my mind about it.”

Mrs. Ferguson was thunderstruck.

“I mean to teach him as much as I can of drawing and painting,” continued the minister, looking his wife calmly in the face. “And I should like Audrey to be present

during the lessons. The child is already fond of her pencil. There is no telling what a resource it may be to her some day."

"*William James!* And when you have just heard me say that, even if it was old Betsy Clershaw's grandson, I would not allow it."

"Priscilla, you may say what you like. Phil Hathaway is coming here three times a week."

"Then, Mr. Ferguson, if I might be allowed to express my opinion——"

But Mr. Ferguson had gone away. And, with a woman's instinct, his wife felt that she might just as well not go after him.

They had been married well on to ten years, and never in all that time had she seen such a look of masterhood in his eyes, had she heard such a quiet ring of resolution in his voice.

To do Mrs. Ferguson credit, she never loved her husband so well as at that moment. She was a sensible woman. She might have been a loveable one, if circumstances had sent her a partner whose meekness and quietness had not drawn out the opposite elements in her own character. There must be vigour and resolution somewhere in a house, and if the recognized head of it does not bring these qualities into play, the weaker vessel must needs supplement his deficiencies, losing, as she does so, the very sweetness which ought to have fostered his love. And then, when the love fails, as fail it almost certainly must, it is a little too hard to blame her. Yet one always does.

Phil came for his lesson the very next day, Priscilla eating the bread of submission in silence. Sometimes she thought that if ever a woman had a right to speak, that

woman was herself, doing so much as she did for her family, and, in looking after their interests, looking also after those of the congregation. But if she ever so much as hinted at the boy ceasing to come, or at the wear and tear which his boots caused to the study carpet, straightway the minister looked at her and said—that was the only subject on which he ever steadfastly asserted his own rights—

“Priscilla, I have begun with it, and I mean to go through with it. Do not trouble me. It will make no difference.”

That was the beginning of a regular course of instruction for Phil. Audrey was always in the study during the lessons. She used to look on in silence at what he was doing, and, when he had gone, she would pick up any stray piece of paper, and try to copy his pictures. Her father let her do it, not taking much heed of her work, until he saw

that it was good of its sort, and then she was allowed to take her place regularly as a pupil. Later on, when Phil began to learn sketching from nature, she used to go with him and her father down to a little bit of ragged sloping ground at the end of the garden, from which there was a pretty view of the castle.

Phil never began his own work there until he had made a comfortable place for Audrey close to himself, and there the little maiden used to amuse herself with pencil and paper, giving a shy look up now and again into Phil's face, as he stooped down to help her over some difficult part of her lesson. For he was the only one, except her father, who ever showed her much lovingkindness now, the very fact of those lessons, which she looked forward to so much, being a sort of offence to her mother, who could be crusty to Audrey about them,

when she could not relieve herself in any other way. And, in process of time, she came to look upon her eldest daughter as something like old Ben Hathaway himself, a little touched in the upper story. For that any child of hers, brought up under good management, and with such an example of household industry always before her eyes, should yet care for nothing so much as maundering about with a pencil and a bit of paper, was, to say the least of it, as near an approach to something odd as the church clerk's notions about ventilation and bed-room windows.

But if William James was bent upon spoiling the girl, he must do it. She had said what she could.

## CHAPTER IX.

SLOWLY those following years dragged on for the minister of Dimplethorpe Independent church. The less interest he felt in the public part of his work—and he certainly was taking less and less interest in that part—the more his mind was turned back upon itself. Month by month the gulf between what he thought, and what he dared openly to express, grew wider. For his people had long ago decided for themselves what truth was. They had a certain number of doctrinal formulas which they had arranged on their own account, like the



bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, and all that they required of their pastor, in the exercise of his pulpit functions, was that he should turn the tube round and round twice every Sunday, and show them the bits of glass in different positions. They measured his skill by the variety which he could produce, or by the different lights which, as he shook the toy, he could cause to fall upon one piece of glass after another. That was their manner of religious teaching.

But, if he should have ventured to knock out the end of the kaleidoscope altogether, and, as its coloured and gilded little stock in trade lay scattered on the ground, incapable of further manipulation, show them God's fair blue sky beyond, what distress and tribulation would have taken hold upon the people! With what haste would they have picked up the fragments, and hurried with them to the nearest toy-shop,

and had them re-set, and then have looked about for a showman who would undertake to turn the tube quietly and reverently, and never think of showing them other than it contained. For what could a congregation need more than to have seven pieces of glass presented before them twice every Sunday in infinite varieties and combinations?

Mr. Ferguson's misery was that for him the kaleidoscope had become no longer all-sufficient. It was amusing sometimes to take it up, and give it a turn, and to watch the quaint shapes and colours. But to make that bit of tin case his entire outlook when there was God's great world of truth to study, *that* he could no longer do. Yet that was what Deacon Polson and the rest of them asked from him. With nothing more nor less than that would they be content.

Then what followed? He felt more and more the weariness of the life which he was living. Between what he believed to be truth, and what he had bound himself to declare to the people as truth, a deed of legal separation, if not an actual divorce, had been decreed. Man could not join what God had put asunder.

Sometimes he thought he would give up altogether. Surely there were churches elsewhere, in which he might stand up and repeat God's message as God had given it to him. But, if there were, they did not send him an invitation to their pulpits. And in the meantime there was Priscilla darning away at the everlasting stockings and petticoats; and the five children—Audrey now a studious, thoughtful girl, with his own mind and his own tastes—needing to be clothed and fed and educated. And with a nerveless hand he went on turning the kaleido-

scope Sunday after Sunday, but turning it slowly and more slowly, until at last the bits of glass would scarcely fall into new positions at all, or fell with a jerk and a rattle which betrayed too much of the machinery. Mr. Ferguson must take care what he was about, or a man with more power of wrist would be sent for.

This was what Mrs. Ferguson kept saying to him over and over again, only she put it in rather a different manner. She told him that if he did not infuse more life and energy into his sermons, if he did not present what he had to bring before the people in a more attractive form, they would begin to speak seriously to him about his resignation. Indeed whispers, not exactly about resignation, but something of the sort, had been already heard. Nobody had mentioned it to her straightforwardly, but, all the same, she knew as well as could be that

it had been said. She was not a woman who could be blinded by a little surface politeness on the part of the leading members, when there was discontent underneath. And then, what was to become of the children?

There had been some talk of Audrey going to live with her grandmother Ferguson, in London. Mrs. Ferguson rarely came to Dimplethorpe, not getting on smoothly there with her daughter-in-law, but still she had a kindly feeling for the children, especially Audrey, the child being her father over again in appearance and disposition. And Audrey had been sent to London for a month, during which time she had pined and wearied so that her father had had to go and fetch her home again. A pity, Mrs. Ferguson junior said, for she could well have spared her among so many.

Indeed, Mrs. Ferguson used to complain sometimes to her cousin Tholthorpe that Providence had dealt hardly by her in giving her, as an eldest daughter, a girl who had so little energy or common sense as Audrey, at thirteen, could boast of. What she had done, she did not know, that she should be let down in such a manner. If ever there was a woman who tried to do her duty by her family, she could stand up before the whole congregation, if need be, and say she was that woman. Yet here was Audrey, good for nothing in the house but sewing and mending. She would take things into a corner, away from everyone else, and darn them with patience which Job might have envied; and for seaming and back stitching she was not to be complained of; but when you had said that, you had said all that could be said. It was Rose Emma, who, at twelve, could take care of the twins,

and talk to people who happened to call, and go errands for her mother, and sort the clothes for the wash, and bring home a prize regularly every half year from school for something or other. And it was Frances Ann, who, at ten and a half, could be trusted to dust the drawing-room ornaments, or to beat eggs for a pudding without getting them smeared all over the front of her frock, or to lay the cloth neatly for dinner when the maid of all work was busy cleaning. Whereas, if you set Audrey to any of these things, you had to watch her all the time, and, in the end, do it yourself. Which was her father's fault, nothing less than that, for letting her waste her time these four years past with that foolish drawing, when she ought to have been spending every minute she could spare from school over some sort of useful house-work.

But the drawing lessons were going on still, not less a joy and delight to Phil than to his master. Phil was doing good work now, and to help him in it was the element of satisfaction in Mr. Ferguson's life. He was still going on with basket-making, that being his only means yet of earning a livelihood ; but Mr. Ferguson was casting about in his own mind for some means of getting the lad such a regular art education as should lift him out of that drudgery. When he was not sketching or painting, Phil was making crab and lobster pots with an industry which might have been a lesson to his master. Indeed, often and often, the minister standing at the door of old Ben Hathaway's cottage, and watching the lad's long lithe fingers working in and out so deftly among the osiers, wished he could push with half so much purpose through the daily more wearisome drudgery



of his own employment. Phil's cheerfulness and hearty goodwill over the turning of *his* kaleidoscope, when all the time he was longing to be with his paints and pictures, made Mr. Ferguson ashamed of himself. Only he justified his own want of interest in the profession to which he had devoted himself, by reflecting that the more rapidly, under present circumstances, he turned the theological kaleidoscope, the worse it was really for the people who looked through it. What they needed was to get rid of the toy and look at God's blue heaven instead. He would have shown them that, but they would not. He had done his duty. At least he thought he had. Yet if he could have pulled off his coat and woven lobster-pots with Phil Hathaway, he would have been happy.

He wanted to get the lad sent to London. He had written to Mr. Evans, who still

lived with old Mrs. Ferguson, about him, and sent up some of Phil's drawings. Mr. Evans had given a favourable opinion of them, and, what was better still, had furnished him with good copies, but he was getting beyond his master's training now. Unless he could go to those Art classes at Kensington, and give his whole time and energy to the work, he would have to stop at mediocrity. All that he had already done would be lost, and for his life-work he must still drudge on at the basket-making.

But how to meet the expense of those Art classes, that was the difficulty. Old General Burnaby, who was taking an interest in the boy, had promised to think about it. Mr. Ferguson's mother would be willing to take him into her house, and board and lodge him for nothing, since it was settled

that Audrey could not live with her ; so that, if the clothes and class-fees could be provided, all would be right. The General had not said anything definite yet about what he intended to do, but he was not a man to show friendly feeling and then let it come to nothing. He had had Phil up to the Manor House several times, and seemed to have taken a fancy to the lad. So had Miss Burnaby. She said he had the make of a gentleman in him, spite of his shy, awkward ways and ill-fitting clothes ; and that, to the General's sister, was a great deal better than cleverness, though cleverness was good enough in its way.

Perhaps too she had found out that Audrey had the make of a lady in her, for her friendship to the timid girl had gone farther now than the sending of biscuits to her in Mr. Ferguson's pocket. Audrey went every

Saturday afternoon to the Manor House, to have tea, and so far neither the Indian curiosities nor the old-fashioned English flowers had been any worse for the touch and look of dissent upon them. Indeed Miss Burnaby looked forward to those Saturday afternoons almost as much as Audrey did. There was something so quiet and refined about the girl. She had such pretty ways. She went about with such unconscious grace. Where could she have got it all? Miss Burnaby said sometimes that she did not believe she belonged to Mrs. Ferguson at all. She must be a changeling, only that she was so like her father.

“But mind, Jack,” she used to say to her brother, “it goes no further than Audrey. I am not going to ask those others—what do you call them? Rose Emma, Frances Ann, and the rest.”

“All right, Jane,” the old man re-

plied. "They can take care of themselves."

And so they could. For Mrs. Ferguson was proud to say there were no girls in all the congregation who could be compared, for cleverness and management, with her second and third. If only poor Audrey had been like them.

At last Mr. Ferguson's doubts were settled. The General sent to ask him up one evening, and over a quiet cigar in the library it was settled that Phil should go to old Mrs. Ferguson, and attend the art schools, his fees and other necessary expenses being provided by the Manor House people. At any rate that was to be done for six months. At the end of that time, if he showed himself really capable of making something out, the General would go on paying for him until he could get afloat. If not, he must just come back to the basket-making. Mr. Ferguson was to write to his

mother and Mr. Evans that very night, and, as soon as they could be ready for him, Phil was to go.

## CHAPTER X.

MR. EVANS did not take long to make up his mind. He had kept his eye on Phil's work keenly enough to know that there was the right sort of stuff in it. He might come at once, the very next day if Mrs. Ferguson could be ready for him. And Mrs. Ferguson could. So that was all settled.

Mr. Ferguson met the postman and read Mr. Evans' letter as he went home across the osier flats. On his way, he called in at Ben Hathaway's cottage, to tell Phil that he might pack up his things

and be ready to start to-morrow. Then he went up to his study to gather together a few of the boy's drawings, intending to show the letter to his wife at tea-time.

Priscilla never said anything about Phil. If he happened to be mentioned, she preserved a dignified silence. She had been conquered in that matter, and she submitted with the fortitude of a sensible woman, but she had her feelings about it, nevertheless. Sometimes she might say they almost amounted to bitterness.

For it was not as if, with that sudden act of independence, William James had at once risen to an appreciation of his duties as head of a family, and acted accordingly, taking the conduct of affairs in his own sphere entirely out of her hands. Then she should have respected him. She could even have gone to the extent of sympathising with him a little about Phil,



though she should always have had a private sense of injury respecting the wear of the study carpet. But William was as shiftless and undecided as ever, except on that one point. He left everything to her. He let her toil and slave over the house accounts, whilst he was sauntering about with his hands behind him, up and down the garden walks. It was she who had to arrange about the children's schooling, bargain with Miss Hart about taking the three of them at a somewhat lower figure, and letting the music be put in free. In addition she had to be everlastingly calling upon the more important members of the congregation, by way of keeping them in a good temper, alas! a difficult matter now. For, hide it from herself as she would, there *was* a perceptible difference in the way they behaved to her, and she could

not talk for five minutes now with Deacon Polson without hearing something which she knew as well as could be meant discontent.

Not that she ever allowed anyone to say a word to her against her husband. She was too good a wife for that. Let but Deacon Polson, or Mr. Tewksby, or the best and richest of them, give utterance to a single thing which could be actually taken hold of, and they would soon find out what manner of woman they had to deal with. But still she knew, all the same, that something was stirring in their minds, and she knew, too, that her husband did not visit about amongst his congregation so much as he ought to have done, if he meant to keep in good repute with them. And taking this in connection with the great amount of responsibility which he left in her hands,

both as respected household and church matters, she felt that in the privacy of domestic life she had a right to express her opinions pretty freely.

Of course Mr. Ferguson had been much cheered by that letter from Mr. Evans. His labours now for Phil were going to have a successful ending. Who could tell what the lad might do for himself in London, if he only stuck to work there as vigorously as he had done in Dimplethorpe? And from the long talk he had with Phil when he went to the cottage to tell him about the letter, he was sure that he would. He had not felt so light at heart for many a day as when he called at the General's house to tell him the good news, and then came briskly home with the letter in his pocket, intending to tell his wife at the first convenient opportunity.

Mrs. Ferguson had not had by any means so pleasant a time of it that afternoon. In the first place she had been balancing her household accounts, and had found that the expenditure during the last quarter had exceeded the income by several pounds. In the next place, Tennant, the maid of all work, had given warning, for she said the work of the house was more than one pair of hands could do, unless a small girl was kept to help. And what a small girl meant, Mrs. Ferguson knew well enough. You never could tell where the meat went to, nor the bread, nor the dripping, nor anything else, when you had a person of that sort in the house. In the third place, she had made the unpleasant discovery, when sorting the clean clothes from the wash, that the sheets and tablecloths were beginning all at once to give way, and where new ones were to come

from, with a balance of already several pounds on the wrong side, she should like to know.

Therefore she was not in the best of tempers as she brought down an armful of small things to mend, and flung them in a heap on the table. Audrey sorted out her share, the stockings, and took them into the bow-window behind the curtain, where she was soon darning away, as was her custom, in silence. You might as well be by yourself any day, Mrs. Ferguson used to say, as have Audrey for company, she had so little to say for herself.

Mr. Ferguson came in, looking more cheery than usual. Not of course that his wife would sympathise with him about Phil's prospects. If he had told her that Phil was elected President of the Royal Academy, she would not so much as have stirred a

finger, feeling that from the beginning she had been an injured woman as regarded that affair. Still she might be glad to hear that he was going away, if only on account of the study carpet.

“Towers and battlements of Troy again, my dear,” he said pleasantly, looking at the unmended petticoats and pinafores, over which his wife had been toiling for the last hour and a half.

It was the very worst thing he could have said. That he even looked cheerful at all, was a crime, considering the state of the balance-sheet; but that he could jest, and about her labours, too, and that when she had once before informed him that such jesting was not agreeable to her, was rather too much. His words fell like a spark amongst the tinder of angry, impatient thoughts which had been smoul-

dering in her mind all the afternoon. She looked up severely.

“I think I have told you once before, William James, that I do not understand your allusions. If you want to insult me, do it straightforwardly, and I shall be able to reply. I am not a woman of education, or I could stand up for myself.”

Mr. Ferguson put the letter back into his pocket.

“Priscilla, don’t be angry. It was nothing but a little harmless raillery.”

“I don’t understand raillery either, William James. It takes all the intellect I possess to manage my family properly. And if you do not help me a little more, I shall not be able to go on with *that* much longer.”

And Mrs. Ferguson flung back her cap-

strings, which was equivalent to a declaration of war. She had really endured this sort of thing long enough.

“William James, I do not speak in a spirit of anger. I wish to be reasonable. But there *are* limits to a man’s neglect of his wife and family. I have been going over the accounts this afternoon.”

Mr. Ferguson sat down. He must make up his mind to it now. To retreat, under the circumstances, would have shown a pusillanimous spirit.

“And I wish to say that I cannot keep things together any longer. I have toiled and slaved for you as few women would have done, and I can conscientiously say that I have not had a thought, except how to manage my family and servants.”

Mr. Ferguson could confirm *that* statement, though he did not say so, for fear of giving further offence. Priscilla’s “thoughts”



were indeed too exclusively of a domestic character.

“It is not what many women can truthfully declare, William James, but it is time now for me to speak my mind. And I am bound to tell you that, if you intend to go on wasting your time with that young Hathaway as you have been wasting it for the last four years and more, I must give up.”

And Mrs. Ferguson looked fixedly at her husband. She had said it, and she would abide by it. He might assume, if he liked, that very seldom worn air of authority, but it would not affect her again, as it did before. She knew now that he was not capable of carrying it out. To put on the master now and then, and leave your wife to do the rough work, was a mean thing. If William James thought she was going to fall back into the ranks any more, he was

mistaken. If she fell back at all, it would be to leave him the generalship in everything, not that matter of the drawing lessons only; and then she should like to know what would become of the family.

Mr. Ferguson sighed.

“Priscilla, what I have done for Phil is the one thing in which I have *not* wasted any time.”

“Very well, William James. If you look at it in that light, I have nothing more to say.”

“Neither have I.”

That was aggravating, If a man would only speak, you knew where you had him. At any rate he was sure to expose some little loophole, through which you might aim a dart. But when he would say nothing all, what could you do? You might as well shoot your arrows into feather beds, for any hurt they could give him. She did

expect that when she let the matter drop in that aggrieved way, he would have come forward like a man. If indeed William James ever *could* be a man about anything. But she would make one more effort.

“And Audrey, too, getting into the same shiftless way.”

There was a slight rustle in the bow-window, but Mrs. Ferguson was too much interested in her subject to notice it.

“Yes, Audrey too. What you are responsible for, in encouraging her to such a waste of time, I do not like to say. At more than thirteen, I would not trust that girl to sweep a room. And as for clear starching and ironing, you might as well set either of the twins to do it. I tremble when I think of that girl’s future.”

“Audrey has talent, Priscilla. She will be able to take care of her own future. I intend her to be thoroughly trained in

drawing. It may be very useful to her some day, in earning a livelihood for herself."

"Earn a livelihood she must, goodness knows, William James. But not in that way, if you please."

"Yes, in that way. 'She ought to be able to devote most of her time to painting, and I shall try to let her do so."

"Begging your pardon, William James, you shall do nothing of the sort. I have not toiled for my family all these years to have matters taken out of my hands in that way. I have spoken to Miss Hart about her, and she is going there as pupil-teacher after the holidays, with music lessons free. If she does not begin to earn a few shillings now, I do not know what is to become of us, and the congregation falling away as it is, owing to your negligence. I am sure I expect every day that the deacons will send a

letter, asking for your resignation. And to go on with that boy as you do."

"I think it is you who are going on with him now, Priscilla; but you need not go on any longer. My mother is willing to give him board and lodging in her house, and General Burnaby will pay his class fees at the Kensington School of Art. He is to go there to-morrow. Make yourself quite easy."

And with that, the minister went away to his study. He felt he might retreat honourably now, though the retreat could scarcely be described as peace with honour.

When he was gone, Mrs. Ferguson gathered up the mended linen, with intent to carry it away and then make a raid upon the study. She was in that state of mind when even Phil's going away without her being consulted about it was a grievance.

On the way she stumbled over the cur-

tain, behind which Audrey was sitting.

“You here, Audrey, child!” she said, impatiently. “Dear me! if ever there *is* a place where you ought not to be, one is sure to find you in it. Have you run those strings into Anna Mary’s pinafore?”

“No, mamma; you never said anything to me about it.”

“Then I meant to, which is the same thing. But it’s all your carelessness. I am sure I don’t know what I have done that so much should be laid upon me. Look after them at once, will you? And another time, do sit where you can be seen. One might think you were always ashamed of yourself to go creeping into corners in that way.”

## CHAPTER XI.

AUDREY gathered up herself and the stockings, and went out of the room, feeling as cold as any stone.

Poor Audrey! Mrs. Ferguson was quite right when she said that Providence had not done handsomely by her in giving her such a helpless girl as the eldest of five. Audrey had a brain which developed very slowly, and her nature was of the brooding, retiring sort which cannot rise buoyantly over any shortcomings of intellect. If Rose Emma or Frances Ann got into scrapes, they were out of them directly. Five minutes after-

wards they would come to their mamma with the most complacent of smiles, and ask if there was anything they could do for her. Now Mrs. Ferguson was a woman who liked that sort of thing. She never sulked. She had a thing out and had done with it, and she liked other people, her own children included, to do the same.

But Audrey, if she got into trouble about breaking too many eggs into a pudding, or making the button-holes on the wrong side of her father's shirt-collars, and received in consequence a somewhat severe scolding for her carelessness, would mope over it for a whole day. Indeed, you might think yourself well off if she got out of the sulks within a week. And all she could say for herself in excuse was, she did not know. Did not know! Such nonsense! As if a girl of more than thirteen ought not to know by instinct how many eggs went to a



pudding for seven people, and what was the right side of a shirt-collar to put the buttons on. If Mrs. Ferguson, with a family like hers to manage, and such a small income to do it upon, was to spend her time in teaching every single separate girl of them how many eggs to put into a pudding, there would be no end to it. She had never been taught. She had found out, and so had Rose Emma and Frances Ann. And for Audrey to sulk like that because she was too dull to do the same.

A queer child, a very queer child. But she was her father over again. He was one of the most awkward of men to get straight with, if once you spoke a wrong word. Not that he ever got into a temper. It was not that sort of thing at all; but he had such a way of shutting himself up, which she must say, to a woman of her disposition, was very trying. And Audrey was just the

same. But it was a comfort that she and her father got on so well together; for a housekeeper she was not, and never would be, and so, if she could get enough book-learning to be teacher in a school, it was perhaps about the best thing that could be done for her.

Poor Audrey knew tolerably well what her mother thought about her. She had been told it over and over again, in words spoken with no unkindness of heart, for Mrs. Ferguson loved all her children, in her own active, managing sort of way; and if Audrey got more scolding than the rest, it was given her with the best of intentions on her mother's part. And in the course of these scoldings, too, she had not unfrequently been informed of the depressed state of the family finances, as a wholesome stimulus to the study of domestic economy. If they had had money enough and to spare, her

mother used to say, the eggs and the button-holes would not have been of so much consequence; but with every sixpence having to be looked at on both sides before it was spent, and with their father's position as minister of Dimplethorpe so uncertain, it behoved all the girls to think what they were about, or there would soon be no puddings to put eggs into, and no shirt collars to require buttonholes at all.

Audrey would listen with a vague sense of uncomfortableness. But then she had heard this sort of thing said so often, while still the shirts and the puddings went on being made as usual, that she had got into the habit of taking off a considerable percentage for irritation or impatience on her mother's part. Mrs. Ferguson was always in a bad temper when she made those alarming statements as to the future. Nothing ever came of them. Though they made Audrey

feel miserable just at the time, because it was a pain to her to hear a cross word from anyone, she grieved over them more as putting a barrier between her and her mother, than anything else. But now, this afternoon, she had unawares heard the same thing said, and said in the seriousness of a solemn conclave with her father. And her father, who never got out of temper, or looked at things other than calmly, had accepted them and sighed over them.

She herself was shiftless and unsatisfactory. They were getting into debt. She was going to be a pupil-teacher at Miss Hart's. Her father and mother had quarrelled. That meant gloom and silence in the home for days. How dreary it all was!

But all these things fell into her heart with a less chilling sense of calamity than the news her father brought, that Phil

Hathaway was going to London the next day, going for always.

Now almost all the sunshine that ever visited Audrey's life came to it through Phil. They used to draw together in her father's study, and though Phil was so far in advance of her that any little productions of hers were scarcely worth a word of praise in comparison with his, still it was pleasant to feel that she could tread, though far off, in his footsteps. And Phil did praise her a little now and then ; and he told her that he was sure she would one day be able to paint very nicely ; words which helped her more than a whole afternoon full of instructions. But who would praise her now, and who would help her when she stuck fast in her work, and who would put her towers straight and her trees into perpendicular, and wash in the clouds for her, and help her to get the right tints

in her foregrounds? And, above all, who would ever speak kindly to her, and give her that feeling of protection which somehow she always had when Phil was near?

Audrey forgot about the pinafore strings. Indeed she was too miserable to remember anything. She went slowly towards the bit of ragged ground by the moat-side, the place where she was generally to be found when anything had gone wrong with her, for it was well away from the house, and Rose Emma and Frances Ann never cared to go there, because they said it was so lonely.

To her surprise, Phil was sitting on the grassy hillock where they came for their sketching lessons, working away just as industriously as if nothing had happened. Perhaps he did not know. Perhaps her father had not told him yet. But of course he would know very soon, and then most

likely he would begin to feel very important, and he would not care any longer for a poor little stupid thing like herself. Perhaps he had only been kind to her at all because he was sorry for her. What else was there for anyone to be kind to her about?

This thought gave just a little coldness to her manner, which Phil, quite as sensitive in his way as Audrey was in hers, did not fail to perceive, though he did fail to understand its reason, not being quite so destitute of self-appreciation as his little companion.

"I didn't know you were going to be here this afternoon," she said, hesitating as if undecided whether to stay or go.

"I didn't know, either," said Phil, "but Mr. Ferguson has been to see grandfather, and he says I am to start for London tomorrow, so I'm trying to get this picture of the tower finished. He has often said he

should like to have a nice picture of it from this place, with the gable end of grandfather's cottage in there among the trees. I suppose you know I'm going."

Phil, spite of his outward manners, which perhaps no London society would quite wear off, had interest enough in Audrey, and desire enough to be of importance to her, to wish that she would express some sorrow at his going away. And at the same time he had just so much shyness as to shrink from letting her know that he had any sorrow about it himself. Though anyhow, for him, the sorrow must have been a very secondary feeling; for what boy with art in his brain, and basket-making in hand, would not gladly follow the leading which took him away from the basket-making, though at the same time it took him away from the little maiden who had been wont to look for the joy of her life from his smile, or to find



her happiness in waiting upon his needs?

Audrey could hear no regret in the words, so she naturally concluded he felt none. And there crept up a faint cloud of misunderstanding between them, which put the finishing touch to her distress.

She was turning to go away.

“You may just as well stop, Audrey. I daresay we shan’t have a drawing lesson here again for a good long time. Come here and I’ll make a place for you.”

He spread his coat in a little green hollow, and made her sit there whilst he went on with his painting. She leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, and her chin between her hands, watching the minnows dart about under the duckweed. She was out of tune with him, and for Audrey to be out of tune with anyone, was for her to be simply miserable.

Unawares the big tears rolled down her

cheeks, and fell upon her holland apron. Phil was not so absorbed in touching up a bit of ivied battlement on his tower, that he failed to see them drop.

“I say, Audrey, what are you crying about, has Mrs. Ferguson been cross?”

For anyone who had been in the habit of spending two hours of three afternoons a week in the Moat House study, could not have avoided hearing Mrs. Ferguson's voice frequently uplifted in accents the reverse of sweet.

“Not particularly,” said Audrey. And two more tears came, but she managed to get up her hands in time to keep them from falling on her apron.

“Then what is the matter?”

“Things are always being the matter.”

“Yes, but they are not always being matter enough to make you cry over them. I say, Audrey.”

“Well.”

“I wonder if you’re sorry I’m going away to London.”

Audrey was very quiet. Only she began to sob.

Phil put his arm round her. He was half glad that his going away could make Audrey sorry enough to cry, and he was half grieved that he should have her no more to help and take care of. And then he wondered whether he should miss her very much, and whether he should find anyone in London who would be another Audrey to him.

“Never mind,” he said, warming her two cold little hands in his. “I daresay I shall come back to see you before very long. Mind you work hard and get to draw really well before then.”

“How can I?” said Audrey, nestling up

her fingers into his. "I can't ever do anything."

"Oh! yes, you can if you like. Mr. Ferguson says you will be able to very well, if you try."

"Perhaps I could, if anybody cared for it. But nobody *does* care."

"Oh, yes! I care very much, Audrey. And if you will make a really nice picture for me, and give it to me when I come back, I will keep it all my life."

"Well, I *will* try," said Audrey, with a strange new feeling of pride and pleasure in her heart. It was just what she wanted, to do something for somebody.

Just then there was a voice from the top of the garden.

"Audrey! Audrey!"

"That is mamma. I must go."

And, with a vivid sense of criminality, Audrey remembered the pinafore-strings.

“But you must say good-bye to me before you go.”

“Well, good-bye.”

And she was going to shake hands with him.

“No, Audrey, not like that. You know you once asked me to kiss you, and I did. And now I want you to kiss *me*.”

With a quiet, wondering look, Audrey lifted her face to his, and Phil kissed her forehead.

“Good-bye, Audrey. I shall never forget you. Maybe I shall come and say a proper good-bye, but it won’t be like this.”

Again the voice called, and Audrey fled up the moat-side, not even casting one backward glance at Phil, and with no thought but the pinafore-strings in her mind.

## CHAPTER XII.

MRS. FERGUSON had not been in the best of possible tempers when she carried that heap of clothes away.

Phil going to live with the old lady in London. Well, to be sure ; if William James's mother had so much money to spare, she might have used a little of it in helping the girls to school, or sending them a new frock apiece, now and then. If a basket-maker, and he the church clerk's grandson, too, was to be considered before her own flesh and blood, things had come to a pretty pass. And where were the lad's

clothes to come from? Out of William James's pocket, no doubt. His own children might eat porridge and dry bread, so long as that shambling lad, who had worn a thin place on the study carpet already, could be taught to spoil good paper with his daubs. Was there ever a woman who had so much to put up with as herself?

And there, lying on the bed in the twins' room, was Anna Mary's pinafore, with never a string put into it. That was just the way if you asked Audrey to do anything. But, say a word to her father about the girl's being so shiftless, and you could never get him to do anything but encourage her in it. He would find it out one day, however.

And, with the pinafore in one hand, and the unattached strings in the other, Mrs. Ferguson sallied into the garden.

Yes, there was Audrey, down by the moat-side, and that scamp of a Phil Hatha-

way sitting close beside her, with his arm round her. Mrs. Ferguson would like to know what *that* meant. Probably nothing at all, but it was a most unseemly thing, and for a lad in his position, too. If Phil had been going to stay in Dimplethorpe, he should have heard about it. And then she called as loudly as a good broad chest and a good pair of lungs would let her call—

“Audrey! Audrey!”

And upon that Audrey had got up, and so had Phil, and he had kissed her before she came away. Such impertinence! And it was no use telling her husband, either, for he would be sure to justify it. There was nothing William James would not justify, if Audrey and Phil Hathaway were in any way connected with it.

“Audrey, you will please set these strings on, *at once*.”

There was something awful in the tone



of those two last words, but Audrey's conscience applied them to her forgetfulness, and nothing more.

Mrs. Ferguson kept Audrey in her sight the whole of that day. The next, Phil called to say good-bye, but the girl was away at school, and her mother said there was no need for Phil to call again. That same evening he went to London, and Mrs. Ferguson felt that she had done all a woman could be expected to do, under the circumstances.

Phil was just eighteen when he came to Dimplethorpe next time, to attend his grandfather's funeral. The old man had died suddenly. Phil had worked hard in that time, quite hard enough, Mr. Evans said, and with sufficient success too, to warrant General Burnaby in continuing the allowance for him. He had already taken several prizes, and he was now

competing for the most valuable one of all, which would give him the privilege of three years' study on the Continent. Phil said nothing about that himself, either to the old General or Mr. Ferguson, for the thing he coveted was so great that he dared not let himself think he would succeed. Still, as Mr. Evans said, even to try for it was a good thing. If he failed, he could but try again next year. But Mr. Evans did not think he would fail.

For the lad had worked with such a will. He seemed to have a man's purpose and a man's strength in him. Morning, noon, and night he was up in that little room painting; that little room in which William Ferguson had once spent many a pleasant, dreamful day. And when he was not there, he was at the class-room, or out in some quiet country place,

working, still working, at the rustic pictures he loved so well. No need, Mr. Evans said, to warn him against the temptations of London. No need, said old Mrs. Ferguson, for anyone to sit up at nights for him, or fear that he would come home in other than good company. Indeed, Phil's fault was that he cared for no company at all, either good or bad, so long as he could have a brush in his right hand and a palette in his left. That was Phil's idea of happiness.

He had just been eight months away when his grandfather died. In that time Mr. Ferguson and the General had heard these good accounts of him, but Mrs. Ferguson, with true feminine consistency, held herself aloof from any sort of interest in the lad, or young man as they must begin to call him now. She had made up her own mind about him long ago. It was

ten to one if he ever succeeded. Deacon Polson, who had seen a great deal of the world, and almost every other sensible man in Dimplethorpe, said the same. Of course General Burnaby had plenty of money, and he could afford to throw it away, if he liked. And if old Mrs. Ferguson chose to waste her comparatively small substance over boarding and lodging a young man who was doing all he could to get out of his providential path, well, *she* could do as she liked, too, more especially as her son encouraged her in it. And amongst them all, Phil would come to nothing, as he deserved to do.

Old Ben died suddenly. There was a sort of ill luck about all those Hathaways, which made her still more dubious of the young man's future. The old man had been at work as usual during the day, and in the afternoon Harriet Brown, who used to tidy up for him once a week or so, went in and

found him very ill. She got him some peppermint water, sent the parish doctor to him, went home to get her own tea, and looked in again in the evening, just in time to see him die, the doctor having been able to do nothing but save the trouble of an inquest.

Harriet sent to tell the vicar, who was for awhile too much absorbed with the question of how he should replace Ben at the next Sunday morning service, to think of anything else. At last, however, he did recollect the long-armed, shambling youth who never wore a white collar on Sundays ; and as he knew General Burnaby had had something to do with sending him to London, he sent over to the Manor House to inquire what was to be done. So that it was not until the day after his grandfather's death that Phil knew anything about it, and then he came down at once, and made his home

with Harriet Brown, who lived in the next cottage, until after the funeral.

Not much altered, was Mrs. Ferguson's verdict as she looked him carefully over from top to toe, when he came to see them before he went back to London. If she was not mistaken, there was that in his face which showed that he would not get on in the world. And he was so very awkward at expressing himself; and when what he had to say did come out, it was really very little worth listening to. Perhaps he might be more at his ease when he went and had that long talk with William James in the study afterwards. She could not say, for she had made a point of remaining in the sitting-room, and seeing that Audrey remained there too, until the young man must have been a good mile away from the house. And when he said he should like to go and see the moat, and asked Audrey if

she would go too, Mrs. Ferguson had stopped it, and given the young man a look, which, if he had any sense at all, he might have known well enough meant that she was not going to have any nonsense of that sort.

And Audrey had sat all the time with her sewing work, scarcely so much as saying a word. Just like the girl; she was so curious. She might never have seen him before, by the quiet way she spoke when she did have to answer him a question.

But, as Mrs. Ferguson remarked afterwards to her cousin Tholthorpe, there would be an end of it now. For as the old man was dead, and William James could go to London whenever he liked, there would be no need for the young man to come to Dimplethorpe any more.

So Phil, quite alone in the world now, went back to his painting, carrying in his

heart the quiet face of Audrey as she sat there with her sewing work. And he said to himself as he went away,

“If ever I marry, Audrey shall be my wife.”



## CHAPTER XIII.

STRANGERS scarcely ever came to live at Dimplethorpe, and so, since that railway scheme had failed, there was no need for new houses to be built in the place. There were two highly respectable women in the village who let lodgings. One was Miss Parley. She lived in a neat little house next the church, with a window looking over into the vicarage garden, and another into the churchyard; and her blinds and curtains and fire aprons and all the rest of her things were only second in spotlessness to those of Mrs. Ferguson her-

self. The other was Mrs. Frogston, a widow who lived nearly opposite the Moat House. Her lodgings were not considered quite so "genteel" as Miss Parley's, but they had this advantage, that there was a large bow window on the upper floor, and people sitting in this bow window could look up and down the street and see everything that was going on in it. When Mrs. Frogston had no lodgers, she spent most of her own time in this window; so if you wanted to know all about everybody in Dimplethorpe you had only to ask her and she could tell you.

When a young couple were married, they generally went into one or other of these lodgings until one of the old residents dropped off, and then the old resident's house was "done up" for them. But a Dimplethorpe lady rarely married in the place, as there were no unattached gentle-

men to marry, so that a wedding, when wedding there was amongst other than the poorer folk, rather took from the population than added to it. Housebuilding, therefore, either as an investment or a speculation, was simply a thing unheard of in the village, even if there had been any spare land to build houses upon. Old Squire Bentham had lived in the place eighty years, and never a house had been built in it for all that time, unless the "Bull and Crown," which had been re-backed and re-fronted, and had had new sides put to it, could be called a new house. And even if it could, it did not count for anything, as nobody new came to live in it.

But old Squire Bentham died a few months before Phil Hathaway went up to London; and his son, a gentleman well known for his losses on the turf, came into the property. Still nobody thought he

would part with the land, unless he was very sorely put to it. And to judge by the way things were carried on at the Hall, there was money somewhere at command.

So the Dimplethorpe people were very much astonished when they heard that twenty acres of the Squire's land were going to be sold. Indeed they would not believe it at all, until in one corner of the rich green pastures, just in front of the Manor House, they saw a pole erected and a board on the top of it, and this notice on the board—

“This eligible plot of building land to be sold in sites. For particulars apply to Messrs. Friston and Langley, Estate Agents, Cranbourne Lane, London.”

“Such an eyesore, Jack!” said little Miss Burnaby, trotting downstairs one morning, with her lace lappets in a perceptible state of flurry. “I declare I shall never be able to look out of my window in comfort again.

As if there was no place anywhere in all the field for them to have stuck up their notice, but in the very front of my bed-room window. And now next thing we shall have a row of red-brick villas staring us in the face, every time we draw up our blinds.

“Not just yet, Jane,” said the old General, drily. “I’ll plant half a dozen young sycamore trees at that end of the garden, first thing to-morrow, and if they don’t grow up good, respectable, broad-chested trees before that plot of ground gets sold off in building sites, my name isn’t Jack Burnaby.”

The saplings were planted accordingly, and it seemed as if Jack’s words were to come true, for they grew and budded and blossomed for three whole years, by which time they were more than high enough to hide the obnoxious board, which still proclaimed to every passer-by that a portion of the land old Squire Bentham had hugged so

carefully, was to be sold to pay the debts of his son.

But then as those passers-by were chiefly agricultural labourers, or osier-gatherers, or elderly ladies with plenty of Chelsea china or homespun linen, and very little money, they were not likely to be much interested in the superscription, which was regularly twice a year taken down and re-painted in black and white, and then put up again. If any of the Squire's creditors were waiting for their money until that land was sold, they would probably have to wait a long time.

Those three years wrought little change in Dimplethorpe, save that a few old folks died, leaving their cottages for the young couples who had been lodging with Miss Parley or Mrs. Frogston until they dropped off. Mr. Ferguson and his wife lived on, with their five growing girls, in the house

next the chapel-yard. They had hard work now to crowd into it comfortably, but they could not afford a better one, for money was scarce in Dimplethorpe, and the Squire was a bad one for paying his tradespeople, and it was hard enough to raise the two hundred pounds which the congregation had voted as their minister's salary. Too late now for any amount of visiting and attention on Mrs. Ferguson's part to evoke that extra fifty which would have been such a blessing to the family. Indeed, so far from talking about an extra fifty, the congregation were talking about reducing the stipend by nearly one half, and inviting an unmarried man to occupy the pulpit. Their present minister's preaching was less and less of the popular sort; and as for his pastoral work, at least amongst the rich and influential members, who of course looked for it most, one might almost say that he did nothing at all. The

time seemed to have come for a change.

Unpleasant words to Mr. Ferguson, could he have heard them. For it was long now, years and years, since he had been invited to preach an occasional sermon before any congregation who were in a position to offer him a permanent charge. And those magazine articles which he prepared with so much labour, in the intervals of sermon-writing or listening to his wife's worryings, had been returned to him by one editor after another, until he had lost all heart in preparing them any more. At forty, Mr. Ferguson was beginning to look like a worn-out man. He felt within himself that his life had been wasted. If he had only had leisure, if he had only had ease of mind, if he had only had freedom from family cares, he thought he could have done so much. He was vaguely conscious of great ideas, which he had never been



able to shape into equally great words; or, if he had so shaped them, they had fallen unprofitably upon the ears of careless listeners, and borne no fruit, either to himself or his people.

And there began to be written upon his face the discontent of a man for whom life has been a disappointment; worse than that, a failure, out of which nothing else could be brought. Still he must grind on, for sermon-writing, though it represented nothing of his real opinions, though, instead, it had come to be nothing but a string of platitudes doled out at intervals three times a week, was his daily bread, and only as he could keep these platitudes from becoming utterly wearisome to the people were his wife and children to live in comfort.

The one thing that he felt any interest in now was teaching Audrey. So long as he had Phil, he had not cared so much for her.

He liked talent to be broadly, clearly developed, but he had scarcely patience to dig out and search for that which perhaps might never, after all his trouble, come to the surface. He believed that the artistic faculty, if it really existed, would find its own way out, somehow or other. And so, though he let Audrey spoil any quantity of drawing-paper, and dabble about as much as she liked amongst his colour-boxes, she got little instruction from him, and was too shy to ask for more.

But, since Phil had gone away, it seemed to her father that the girl had worked more earnestly than ever. She was really turning out some very creditable pictures now. If she could have the same advantages as Phil, she might do well enough, though her talent was by no means so distinct as his. She ought to go to those art classes, too, only who was to pay for her instruction

there? What Mr. Ferguson could ask for a stranger, he could not ask for his own child. So Audrey stayed at home, struggling on as pupil-teacher with Miss Hart, giving what time she could to painting, helped a little by good Mr. Evans, who sent copies to her, as he had before sent them to Phil. Mrs. Ferguson had long ago given up trying to make a useful woman of her. Rose Emma and Frances Ann were careering along triumphantly in the housekeeping department, developing at fifteen and sixteen into as self-possessed and practical girls as any mother could wish to see, and universal favourites—whatever might be said of their poor father—with the congregation. But as for Audrey, Miss Hart found no fault with her; she was earning a little by teaching drawing at the school; she was growing up “a genteel sort of figure, that looked well in anything,” as Cousin Thol-

thorpe remarked. And, that being the case, her mother felt she must leave the rest to Providence. She had done the best that lay in her power for the girl. Angels could do no more.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THAT prize which gave its winner the privilege of three years' study on the Continent had been taken a few months after Phil's entrance into the art schools at Kensington. The time had now come for it to be adjudged again. Those three years had been years of hard work for Phil. Mr. Evans, who all along believed that he would win, had decided how the time should be spent if Phil's drawing did prove the successful one. He was to go for a year to Paris, into the art schools there, and study at the Louvre. Then he was to go to Rome,

where Mr. Evans had friends who could help him on. After that he was to return, and try what he could do for himself as an artist at home. He might perhaps begin by being one of the masters in the Kensington School, or in some provincial town, for he must be content, even if he had such a brilliant success as the winning of that prize, to work his way steadily up. Phil's own idea was to earn a little for himself, if he could, in Rome, and then come back and live for a year or two in his grandfather's old cottage at Dimplethorpe, and get a picture into the Exhibition. That was the height of his ambition, at present. And he had made up his mind what the subject of that picture was to be. It was to be a message to Audrey. Only he hoped that long before then he should have been able to tell it to her in a different way. But Phil would not even let himself think about that yet. He

would first win the three years' prize, and then ask for the one which was to be his joy and crown all through life.

Phil never came to Dimplethorpe in those three years. Mr. Ferguson used to go up to London sometimes, to see his old mother, or to call at one editor's office after another, with magazine articles which were never accepted. And he came home again, bringing the General very good accounts of the young man's progress. As the time drew nearer, Mr. Evans was more and more sure that his favourite pupil would be the successful competitor. It was to be settled in the autumn, and Phil was to come over to Dimplethorpe then to say good-bye to his kind friends there, before starting for Paris.

But Mrs. Ferguson knew as well as possible, in her own mind, that nothing would come of it, and she told her husband so,

every time he tried to cheer his uncomfortable life by dwelling on the one piece of good work he had done during its course, the promotion of Phil's art-training. There were many young men in the school, she said, besides Phil, who had energy and perseverance, and talent too, and she thought it would be rather hard upon them if a basket-maker's lad carried off the prize over their heads. If he did carry it off, he would be so conceited about it that probably he would do no good work afterwards; that was often the case with young men who made a flash at first. You never heard of them afterwards. And if he did not get it, why, then, there would be a decent lobster-pot maker spoiled, for he would never care to show his face in Dimplethorpe again. He would just go to the bad, sponge upon his friends to support him, and finally sink away out of sight, and that would be



all William James had wasted his time for.

But, slightly to Mrs. Ferguson's disappointment, there came a telegram from Phil Hathaway to her husband one day, containing a single word. That word was—"Successful."

Such a conceited way of putting it! She wondered he had not spent the shilling instead in employing the village bellman to go round and spread the news. And when next morning a letter arrived, saying that Phil himself would come down in a day or two, to say good-bye before starting for Paris, she told William James that he need not expect her to ask the boy to stay there. They had enough to do with their money without entertaining visitors. Harriet Brown was living in old Hathaway's cottage, and he could put up with her. Or, if that was not good enough, the General might ask him.

“Which, if you read on to the end of the letter, my dear, you will see the General *has* done,” said Mr. Ferguson, meekly. “And Phil says he is going to stay at his grandfather’s cottage, instead.”

“Just like him,” replied Priscilla, pushing back the letter. “No, thank you, I don’t care to read any farther. I always said he had not a bit of the gentleman about him. To go into such low places when he might be improving himself by associating with superior people.”

“I thought you suggested Harriet Brown as a suitable person to put him up,” said Mr. Ferguson.

“William James, I will thank you not to take my own words and use them against me in that manner. I have expressed my opinion of young Hathaway. I have no doubt he does not go to the General’s because he thinks he may be looked down

upon. All his pride and conceit. I have no patience with a young man who cannot take what is provided for him, and be thankful. All the same, you can ask him in to tea and supper if you like."

"Which is just what I mean to do, Priscilla."

And Phil came accordingly. A tolerably good-looking young man, Mrs. Ferguson admitted to herself, but with evidently no talent for getting on in the world. One could tell that from the way he fidgeted about on his chair, and the difficulty he felt in putting a sentence together without beginning it two or three times. She never believed in a young man's success when he stumbled and hesitated in that way. Of course he could draw well, but that would not get him a living. Indeed, it would just as likely as not be the ruin of him, by taking him away from some useful re-

munerative employment. And then to pretend to be so quiet and unconscious about what he had done. It was all pretence, she was sure it was. He was brimful of conceit about it all the time, if only he had been straightforward enough to let it come out.

And when did he mean to go away? For the maid of all work cleared the supper-table, and the girls went to bed, Audrey, who had been wonderfully quiet all the evening, going first. And still he sat and sat and fidgeted about, and talked of first one thing and then another, without being able to say a word worth listening to about anything, until she was as nearly as possible asking him whether he was not afraid to walk by the moat-side to Harriet's cottage in the dark. That might stir him, if anything would, seeing his own father had been drowned in it. But it came out at last.

Who would have thought that the young man had had so much conceit in him? For, after almost any amount of stumbling and hesitation, he said that he had a very important request to make before he went away. Might he be allowed to write occasionally to Audrey? Not that he wished, she being so young, to bind her down to any sort of engagement, but that they might not lose sight of each other, and that possibly she might at some time learn to look favourably upon him.

Not bind her down to any sort of engagement? Well, Mrs. Ferguson rather thought not, as she remarked when talking the affair over with her cousin Tholthorpe a few days after. Considering that the young man had been living on charity up to the present time, and had no prospect of earning anything for himself for years to come, it would just have been going a little too far

to ask any young girl to bind herself down to him, especially when he was going away next day to Paris, and nobody knew what courses he might take when he got there.

And William James had acted as he always did when there was anything important to be settled. He had said that young Hathaway's proposal took him very much by surprise, that he really did not know what to say about it, that he must ask to have a day or two for consideration, and a great deal more to that effect, just as if such a ridiculous proposal could not have been settled at once by a quiet and decided *no*. So young Hathaway went away with a promise that he should receive a reply in the morning.

But Priscilla settled what that reply should be. She had known too well for herself what it was to marry a man with a small

income. The managing and contriving, and the pinching to make both ends meet, were enough to worry the life out of even a clever and capable woman like herself, and Audrey under such circumstances would be simply good for nothing. No, she must marry some one who would be able from the beginning to earn a comfortable living for her; and as she was by no means a plain girl, and had what people generally thought were very elegant, taking ways—though Mrs. Ferguson thought the cheerful practicality of her second and third were a great deal more attractive—most likely she would find some one more eligible than a penniless and shiftless young artist, who was only herself over again as regarded ignorance of all household matters.

So when Phil came very early next morning, Mrs. Ferguson received him alone. She said she was sorry to disappoint him,

but both she and her husband thought it would be advisable for their daughter not to be entangled in any engagement of that kind at present. For her own part she was quite sure that Audrey had no feeling in the matter herself, and it would be much better, both for her studies and for the gaining of proper experience in life, that she should not have her mind occupied with anything of the sort.

“At any rate for the present, Mr. Hathaway,” she said, with a natural air of matronly importance. “Of course if you come back after three years, and are still in the same mind.”

“Which I shall certainly be,” said Phil, with the buoyant confidence of twenty and a half.

“Audrey will then be better prepared to know her own mind on the subject. For the present, her father and I do not wish



her to be disturbed by any such thoughts."

So Phil went away without hand-clasp or look of farewell exchanged between himself and the girl whom he had been loving all these three years. And Audrey, with a whole world of maiden hope and fear hiding quietly away in her heart, heard that he was gone, and never knew how closely the angel of love had passed her by.

## CHAPTER XV.

OLD Jack Burnaby chuckled to himself every time he passed that notice-board on Squire Bentham's bit of pasture land. From the Manor House garden you could scarcely see it now, for the young sycamore trees which were growing up so lustily at the end of the garden in front of Miss Burnaby's bed-room window. Yet it was regularly done up, and told its story afresh in black and white paint every Lady Day and Michaelmas Day, just as if the information it had to give was of the utmost importance to everyone in the village.

But one day, soon after Phil had got that prize, Dimplethorpe in general, and Jack and his sister in particular, were electrified by the intelligence that Dr. Fylingdale, a retired physician, who lived near the vicarage, elderly and unmarried, had withdrawn some of his property from the East Warrenshire Bank, and bought a plot of ground immediately in front of the Manor House, with a view to building there-upon a villa residence, not for himself, but for anyone who might feel disposed to take it.

“If it had been any other plot, Jack dear,” said Miss Burnaby; but just to choose that particular one. If he had taken a bit at the other end of the pasture, it would not have been of half so much importance. One might think he had done it on purpose to vex us.”

“Put up two or three more sycamores,”

said the old General. "They'll have time to grow and be topped, and grow again, before anybody ever gets into a house of Dr. Fylingdale's on old Bentham's pasture land.

"I hope you'll be right, Jack. But it will be a very pretty situation, exactly overlooking the laurel walk that leads up to our front door."

"It will overlook nothing of the sort, Jane. It will overlook nothing but sycamore leaves, and I'll go bail that even if you like to plant a shrub of arbutus, it will be a regular big tree before anybody gets a chance to look over it from Dr. Fylingdale's villa. My name isn't Jack Burnaby if my words don't come right. You've heard me say that before, you know."

"And my name isn't Jane Burnaby, Jack dear, if the villa isn't built and let within a twelvemonth."

“Very well. If it isn’t Jane Burnaby, I don’t doubt it will be something better, though I didn’t think you had any idea of changing it so soon, Miss Jenny. Only let me know in time, please, that I may look about for a nice wedding present for you.”

“Jack! How can you talk in that way? Just as if I should ever be so foolish as to go and do anything of the sort.”

But Jenny laughed, nevertheless. The old General had never given over joking her about the many times that ancient and honourable name of hers might have been changed, if she had only seen matters in the same light as the score or so of gentlemen who had at one time or another aspired to the favour of her hand. And Jane liked to be reminded of it, too.

However, the sycamores were planted, and the Dimplethorpe bricklayers set to work, and by June of the next year a neat

villa of red brick, faced with stone, was shutting out Miss Burnaby's favourite view of the church and village of Cotsford, two miles distant, just on the other side of Squire Bentham's property. A very fine villa indeed, with a porch and verandah over which creepers were to be planted, and a new-fashioned bay window on each side of the door, and three more windows on the first floor, everyone of which looked right over Miss Burnaby's pinks and roses, so that the good little lady could not go out in the morning to take a walk amongst them, without the pleasing reflection that Dr. Fylingdale's villa, or whoever lived in it, was watching every step she took. And over the right-hand bay window, which was exactly opposite Miss Burnaby's bed-room, a large board was reared up, similar to that which surmounted the pole, only more important-looking, and it bore the following

inscription, to be read of everyone who passed that way:

“This extremely desirable villa residence to be let, on lease or by the year. Rent moderate. For particulars and cards to view, apply to Mr. Craybrook, builder, Dimplethorpe, or Messrs. Friston and Langley, Estate Agents, Cranbourne Lane, London.”

It so happened that the very day the villa was completed as to its external appearance, and this legend presented to the public gaze, a sharp gale of wind arose and blew down the biggest and lustiest of the sycamore trees, leaving an awkward gap, like a missing tooth, at that end of the Manor House garden, thus laying bare the board and its inscription to Miss Burnaby's view every time she drew up her window blinds.

“To think of the gale striking that tree, above all others,” said poor Jane.

“Stick in another,” said her brother.

"They're cheap enough, and the soil suits 'em. Why, dear me, there's no need to let ourselves be overlooked for the sake of a sycamore."

"No, Jack. I won't. It's a token, and I'll abide by it. That house will be let before the Michaelmas quarter is in, take my word for it, and so we must just make up our minds to the worst. They may be pleasant neighbours, who can tell? And really, Jack, I've often wondered whom I could send to first, situated as we are here, away from everybody, if you were seized with apoplexy in the night, or anything of that sort."

"But I'm not seized with apoplexy yet, thank you," said the General, who did not relish this casting of his horoscope. "It isn't wiry old soldiers like myself who get knocked off in that sort of way. For all you know about it, I may be good for



another dozen years, so we'll give the house that time to get itself let—shall we, eh, Jane?"

"Jack dear, don't talk in that irreverent way. Something is always sure to happen when we begin to boast. Don't you remember how my favourite old hen gave over laying last week, just because I chanced to remark to the curate's wife what an excellent old creature she had always been?"

"The curate's wife, or the hen, Jane?"

"The hen, of course, Jack. And I dare say you have noticed over and over again that if I happen to make a remark about the goodness of the cream, it begins to turn next day, as sure as sure."

"That's because there's thunder in the air, Jane."

"Perhaps it is; but you won't make me believe that the boasting hasn't something

to do with it. There's a great deal we don't understand about these things."

And Miss Burnaby, somewhat relieved after all to think that whenever her brother *did* have a stroke of apoplexy in the night there would be a house at hand, even if there was nobody in it, went into the garden to count her apricots, the finest apricots in all the country round.

The sycamore tree was never planted, and all through that summer, and all through the next, Meadowfield Lodge, as Dr. Fylingdale had named his new investment, offered its charms in vain to the passer-by. Even advertisements failed to bring tenants, and, before the second year of its emptiness had expired, the old doctor began to regret that he had not left his money in the East Warrenshire Bank, which, spite of all the reports so industriously circulated about it, was still paying a

good solid dividend to the shareholders.

But when Miss Burnaby, trotting home from her daily walk to High Dimplethorpe, met him, as she often enough did, strolling disconsolately past his empty villa, she used to comfort him by the assurance that sooner or later it would find a tenant.

“Because, Dr. Fylingdale,” she would say, “that sycamore tree of ours blew down the very morning that the painters had finished touching up the graining on the front door, and if that isn’t a token, I don’t know what a token is; particularly when it happened to be the very tree in front of the notice-board.”

“It *might* have been the wind,” remarked Dr. Fylingdale, who, being a physician, and therefore a man of science, had to search about for a cause for everything.

“Well, of course, the wind might have something to do with it, doctor. I don’t

dispute that, and blowing such a gale as it did that day, too ; but at the same time I am convinced that it was a token, and some day you will see my words come true. I was so sure of it myself that I wouldn't have another tree planted, because it might look like flying in the face of Providence. And, what is more than that, doctor, Jack has tried over and over again to get the other sycamores to grow together over the empty place, but, try as he will, he can't manage it. He may push and pull and spend as much string as he likes in tying the branches together, but the very next morning there the gap is, as wide as ever, just the exact size, you know, to let me read the notice when I draw up the blind to open my window."

"If you *should* hear of anyone who wants a house," said the doctor, in a melancholy way.

“Oh, dear, yes! Because it would be such a convenience to have a neighbour there, in case poor dear Jack did happen to be taken ill in the night, or anything of that sort. Though really, doctor, I have got so accustomed to the board now, that I should quite miss it, if it was taken away. I look for it as regularly as I look for the daylight when I draw up my blind of a morning.”

“I wish we *could* miss it, both of us,” said Dr. Fylingdale. “Really if nothing turns up before next Michaelmas, I shall have to begin to think about going into the house myself. We *might* be pleasant neighbours, you know.”

And the doctor looked at pretty, trim little Miss Burnaby from behind his high pointed shirt collar, with just a touch of tenderness in his withered old face. She had a nice little property, and she was blessed with excellent health and spirits, and

she was just a few years younger than himself, and she was as dainty as a bit of Nankin china, and could make such delicious cowslip and rhubarb and ginger and currant wines; and in fine there was attractiveness enough about her to give a delightful touch of sunshine to the prospect which lay beyond those words—

“We *might* be pleasant neighbours.”

“Oh, charming!” said little Miss Burnaby, innocent of anything beyond the thought that, if poor dear Jack was seized in the night with apoplexy or anything of that sort, it would be such a convenience to have a neighbour, and that neighbour a doctor, within reach. “I should be *so* delighted. *Do* think of it, Dr. Fylingdale. And then, you know, you could come over now and then and play back-gammon with Jack, whilst I read the papers of an evening.”

Dr. Fylingdale thought he would rather

the old General read the papers, whilst Miss Burnaby played back-gammon with himself, but his mind was scarcely sufficiently made up yet for him to hazard a remark which would appear so like a declaration of personal feelings. So he said nothing, except that he was quite sure they should be very pleasant neighbours if he did really come to Meadowfield Lodge, after all.

But as he pulled up his collar and shook hands with Miss Burnaby, and walked slowly away, he felt it might not be such a very bad thing if the house did not get let before Michaelmas.

## CHAPTER XVI.

IN those days whilst the “new house,” as it was called, there being no other in the place under nearly a hundred years old, was waiting for a tenant, Mr. Ferguson cut that Gordian knot which for years and years had been tightening more painfully round him. And cut it in the only way possible now ; for he died.

There was generally, as might have been expected, a mild sort of low fever moving about amongst the back lanes of Dimplethorpe. In bad seasons, when food was scarce, and autumn rains had flooded the



low-lying lands to the south of the parish, it carried off its dozens of strong men and rosy-faced children, and a great commotion about drainage followed. The beautiful old moat was cleaned out. The open ditches on whose banks the lilies and wild roses and blue forget-me-nots blossomed so bravely, were scraped and trimmed and tidied up and flooded, making them look, as Miss Burnaby said, as close-cropped and uninteresting as a ticket-of-leave man just out of prison. Indeed, she did not know why such a fuss should be made every few years about draining the place. She had lived in it for more than sixty years herself, and neither the moat nor the open sewers had ever been meddled with, all that time.

Talk about the place being unhealthy, indeed! Why, let people go into the churchyard and read the dates upon the gravestones, scarcely anybody ever thinking

of dying under sixty or eighty years of age, and then let them go into your big towns, where thousands upon thousands were spent upon drainage and ventilation, and read the dates upon *their* gravestones, and then say whether sanitary arrangements did not kill a hundred times more people than they cured. Why, the thing spoke for itself, without any thinking about it. Drainage indeed! She had never troubled herself about it, and, what was more, she never intended to do so. And it was her opinion that, if that sort of thing began to be fussed about and worried over in Dimplethorpe, their gravestones would soon have the same story to tell as those of Liverpool and Manchester and Birmingham. And as for appointing an Inspector of Nuisances, why, they might as well go back to the dark ages at once. The curfew bell was still rung in the parish, though nobody thought of put-

ting their fires out when it sounded so prettily across the vicarage lawn. But an Inspector of Nuisances! That was simply despotism. And nobody but the Liberals would ever think of imposing such a thing upon well-bred people.

And indeed, to do the fever justice, it did behave very quietly in a general way, just creeping stealthily up to some half-fed, wholly dispirited man, and sucking the life out of him before anyone knew what was the matter. It was easy enough, when things had gone so far as that, to give the rest of the blame to circumstances. He had got wet through, or he had taken a chill, or he had sat in his damp clothes, and what could one expect then but fever? So the malaria never got the credit of it, after all.

That was how it crept up to Mr. Ferguson, in the dull dreary autumn time which brought him to the nineteenth anniversary

of his entrance upon the Dimplethorpe congregational charge.

Weary years they had been, except the first two or three of them ; weary with the deadening weight of good thoughts crushed from want of time to think them into shape ; weary with the slowly deepening sense of failure and mistake ; weary with the inability to make the best of what that mistake had left possible. Then, worse than all, was the consciousness that, having made this mistake himself, having chosen the lower level of comfort close at hand, instead of toiling for it through years of self-denial, having taken what he thought was ease, and so put for ever from him the superiority of mind and character which once was possible, he had not bravely made the best of that mistake, instead of making it still more a mistake by his selfish brooding over it.

He might have done so much more for

his children. He might have put a little cheerfulness into his own home. He might have gone about amongst the people and met them on their own level, if he could not lift them to his. His life for these nineteen years had been a poor, broken, unmanly thing. And if everyone in his congregation did not think of him as he thought of himself, it was only because they did not know him for what he was. In the beginning of his career it had been his one ambition that men *should* know him for what he was. It was now his shame and humiliation that he dared not let them do it.

And Audrey, the one of all his children who could have appreciated both his capabilities and his disappointments, who could have been a true companion to him in high thoughts, had grown up almost a stranger to him, because he had never sought for her sympathy; and the rest were basking in the

hopeless level of self-complacent commonplace. And Priscilla, loud-tongued, authoritative, with a soul that never rose above clean fire-aprons and balancing of accounts, was for ever chiding him for his want of spirit, and the people were slumbering in their pews, not caring now for any new figure into which he could shake those ancient fragments of glass. And his own vision was dim and feeble, too dim to search any more for God's blue heaven beyond.

William Ferguson brooded over it all until his life became a burden to him, until the vitality which had been slowly leaking out of him for the last nineteen years reached its final drop. Then the malaria, which was always lurking about under the lilies and irises by the moat-side, had nothing to do but fasten upon him, and quietly push open the door which led into another life.

He was not ill very long, at least not very long confined to his room, for he had looked dreary and out of sorts for so many months past, and nothing had ever come of it, that Mrs. Ferguson naturally thought nothing would come of it this time, either. And so she only scolded him a little more impatiently, especially as he began to complain just about the autumn cleaning season, and it was such an inconvenience having a man mooning about the house and hanging over the fire when she wanted to have everything cleared out and tidied up, ready for anniversary day. For if ever people called in a friendly way upon the minister—and goodness knew they called seldom enough in that way now—it would be towards anniversary day, and it would be all she and the girls could do to get the house thoroughly overhauled by then.

And she grew perceptibly out of patience,

and spoke her mind more emphatically to him about the sluggishness which had been such a barrier to the prosperity of the family. It was nothing less than sinful, she said, and those five poor girls growing up. He ought to rouse himself and try to interest the members a little more, and then the members would interest themselves in him.

But it was too late. Instead of shaking off his bad spirits, he let them take more and more entire possession of him, until, as his wife remarked to one and another of her friends, it was almost impossible to get him to stir out of his study; and, as for sitting down and enjoying his food, if you could make him pick as much as would keep body and soul together, it was a wonder. And, as for a smile upon his face, why, that was a thing you never saw.

It was Audrey who took thought for him now. As the damp autumn days crept on,



each taking from him a little of his remaining strength, it was Audrey's care to surround him with such comfort as was possible in the busy, bustling household, where to keep the blinds straight, and the curtains clean, and the chimneys carefully stopped up, was so much more important than any ministry to the poor decaying life wasting there from week to week.

"Your papa just wants to rouse himself, Audrey child," was what Mrs. Ferguson used to say, as the poor girl, who saw better than her mother did how things were going now, returned from the study with some little dainty dish of her own preparing, untasted. It was wonderful what talent Audrey had developed in the cooking line lately. "If he would just put on his great-coat, and go out and pay a round of visits amongst the congregation, it would do him a world of good. That's what I always do-

when I feel myself a bit upset with the worry of the family. Dear me! I wonder what we should all have come to, long ago, if I had given up every time I felt the children and that sort of thing too much for me. I am sure the way I have gone on sometimes, when I have scarcely had strength to put one foot before the other, might be a lesson to anyone."

And then she would bustle in and "rouse up" her husband, as she called it, by telling him how one and another of his more prominent members had been seen lately at the parish church, or how Mr. Tewksby had been visiting his married daughter in London, and what a splendid man they had at Mr. Batesford's chapel. If they could only get such a man in Dimplethorpe, it would be the making of the congregation, which was dwindling down sadly now.

"Doctors indeed, and medicine, William

James, it isn't anything of the sort that you want ; you only want to bestir yourself and take an interest in things. Why, a man is bound to be ill if he stops in the house from morning to night, as you do, to say nothing of what is sure to go wrong when he lets himself do like that. You will see that Mr. Tewksby will be parish churchwarden before another year is out, and you will have nobody but yourself to blame. I can't say more than that."

Once even less than that would have stirred Mr. Ferguson to almost any exertion. For, as an animal of the lower vertebrate order, fully developed as to its fins and tail, and careering in scaly splendour through the upper regions of its ocean world, looks down upon the helpless mollusc which crawls along the floor of that same ocean world, and reflects, with a thankfulness not unmingled with pride, supposing it to be

capable of such feelings, on the infinite stages of growth which separate them; so once did William James, disporting himself in the limpid depths of his own denominational waters, look down with pitying superiority on the Church of England molluscs, who swayed helplessly about, incapable of sight or motion, amongst the tangled seaweed below. And as a vertebrate might regard with horror the idea of one of its own species being so lost to all sense of dignity as to wish—having once known the glories of fins and a tail—to make a descent into the pre-backbone period, and fraternise with oysters and periwinkles again, amongst the slime of the ocean floor, so would Mr. Ferguson have felt his soul stirred within him, had one of the fully developed fishes of his own flock, Mr. Tewksby for instance, shown signs of leaning towards the molluscousness of the Establishment.

But the time was past for any such feeling now. Was there, then, so great a difference, after all, the helpless periwinkle and the happy possessor of fins and a tail being alike debarred from the pure atmosphere of absolute certainty?

Nay, indeed, might not the mollusc, incapable, as one might say, of directing its own movements, be from time to time borne by oceanic currents into that atmosphere, and by reason of the very elementary nature of its respiratory apparatus, be enabled to exist there, under conditions which would have been fatal to its vertebrate or nonconformist relative? It was all a wonder and a mystery, and one could but let it alone. Mollusc and vertebrate alike might one day, by faithfully doing their present duty, struggle upward into a better development, and have air to breathe and an apparatus to breathe it with. And compared with the

infinite ether which stretched above them both, the ocean in which they looked up or down upon each other, dwindled into such pitiful smallness. To sway amongst its tangled sea-weed, or to career through its petty currents, was of little consequence, so that they reached the upper world at last.

“Mr. Tewksby may do as he likes, Priscilla. It is no concern of mine.”

And, with a weary sigh, Mr. Ferguson turned himself over in his easy-chair, and Priscilla bustled out of the study again. Things had come to a pretty pass if a man like Mr. Tewksby could go off to the Established Church, and the minister of the deserted denomination say it was no concern of his. At that rate the two hundred a year would not be forthcoming much longer.

After awhile Audrey went on her own responsibility to the doctor, and Mrs. Fergu-

son was very much astonished to find that her husband was suffering from an attack of low fever, which might or might not develop into something else. Probably it would not develop into anything else, if he got good nursing and generous diet; but a great deal in such cases depended upon these things.

So the minister was put into Audrey's care, and there came for him a few days of the utmost peace he had ever known since the beginning of his Dimplethorpe life. For he soon became too weak to trouble himself about external things, and Mrs. Ferguson was too busy with her autumn cleaning to thrust them much upon him. He might, perhaps, have got round again, for the doctor said, to the last, it was by no means a serious case, if he had only had interest enough in life to care to live. But it was easier to die, and so he let himself slip away, as many another, in the same

condition, has done before him. And after a week or two in that quiet sick-room, during which he and Audrey drew near to each other, heart to heart, as they could never have done before, the minister of Dimplethorpe Independent chapel, greatly to the surprise of his wife and all the congregation, departed this life, in the forty-second year of his age, and was buried, with a good deal of ceremony, as became one who was in some sort a public character, by one of his college professors who came to Dimplethorpe for the purpose. And, at a church meeting held shortly afterwards, the deacons drew up an address of condolence, and sent it to the widow of the man to whom, had he had the ill-fortune to live a few months longer, they would doubtless have forwarded a letter suggesting his resignation. For indeed, as they said to each other, his pulpit teaching was no longer



of that active, practical, stirring sort which his first years of ministration amongst them had led the congregation to expect.

## CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. FERGUSON was not a woman to be crushed by even "the sudden and unexpected blow," as the letter of condolence called it, which had fallen upon her. At any rate, her righteous soul was never troubled by questionings as to whether she had put all the sweetness she could into the life which had now passed beyond power of hers to vex or soothe. She felt that everything a good wife could have done had been done by herself for William James. It was she who had, to speak Scripturally, held up the hands that hung down, and confirmed

the feeble knees. Where would he have been, long ago, but for her vigorous incitements to energy in the discharge of his duties? Who was it that took, to such a great extent, the burden of visiting from his shoulders? Who was it that discerned signs of weariness or impatience amongst the congregation, and communicated them to him, to the intent he might be stirred up to make his sermons more of the popular sort? Who managed everything for him, in order that he might have more time for the making of those sermons? No; there might be, there doubtless were, women who, in the circumstances under which she found herself now, had bitter cause for self-reproach; but she could only say that such self-reproaches never visited her own breast. She had done her duty. And, though the blow was severe, she would not deny that it was unmingled with any sting which the

sense of wifely shortcomings might have brought.

On the Sunday after the funeral, she appeared with her five orphan daughters in the minister's pew, clad of course in the deepest mourning, but with not at all the air of a crushed woman. Mrs. Tewksby, who, sitting in the front seat, was near enough to take notice, observed that, though a black-bordered handkerchief was held to her face when, during the sermon, reference was made to the virtues of her departed husband, the hand that held that handkerchief was very steady, and the handkerchief itself, when removed, showed no trace of tears.

But that was no criterion. Mrs. Tewksby said Mrs. Ferguson had been an excellent wife. The humblest members of the congregation could testify to that. And having for nineteen years done her duty in that state of life to

which it had pleased Providence to appoint her, she could afford to be calm and collected when it pleased Providence to remove her from the same.

To show their respect for her, the congregation raised a purse of fifty guineas, which was presented to her by Deacon Polson. Mr. Tewksby, through the influence of his son-in-law, got the twins Phillis and Anna Mary into an orphanage; and having done as much as that, and printed a tribute to Mr. Ferguson's memory in the leading organ of the denomination, the people thought that their departed minister, together with his wife and family, were handsomely disposed of.

Mrs. Tewksby thought they—the widow and family—would probably leave the place and go into a ready-made linen business somewhere. People generally got on wonderfully well in that way. Or else

taking lodgers. And if it was taking lodgers, she must certainly leave Dimplethorpe, because Miss Parley and Mrs. Frogston were already more than sufficient for the requirements of the place. Indeed Mrs. Frogston had had no lodgers for the last three months, during which time she might have been seen, from morning to night, sitting in her own first floor bow-window, watching everything that went on in the street; and it was from her that Mrs. Tewksby had learned a great deal respecting the Ferguson family, especially the way in which the funeral was managed.

But Mrs. Ferguson had made her own plans, and though they had something to do with lodgers, they had nothing to do with ready-made linen. First of all, she proposed to her cousin Tholthorpe, who was now, like herself, a widow, that she should come and live with her; to which cousin Tholthorpe

gladly assented. Then, when she found that the members had chosen a Mr. Vincent as successor to her husband, and that Mr. Vincent was unmarried, and had no prospects, so far as the congregation could ascertain, of a matrimonial nature, she wrote to him and suggested that, as she was remaining in the Moat House, next door to the chapel, she thought it might be a convenience to him to board with her, as he would then be so nicely situated for the services, besides being in a central part of the village, and within easy reach of the people.

Mr. Vincent saw it in the same light, so it was arranged that he should board with her, occupying Mr. Ferguson's study. Rose Emma and Frances Ann, now good-looking, substantial girls of eighteen and seventeen, staid at home to help their mother. The twins were disposed of at the orphanage.

and Audrey went to Miss Hart's school as principal teacher, receiving a salary good enough to enable her to go to London twice a week and take drawing-lessons from Mr. Evans. She meant to make that, and not teaching, her employment, as soon as she was sufficiently experienced.

Two months after Mr. Ferguson's death, anyone going into the Moat House could scarcely tell that sorrow had so lately visited it. If anything, the place looked more cheerful, for it had been newly painted, and clean blinds were put up, and the study cleared out and made tidy for Mr. Vincent; and Mrs. Ferguson herself bustled about with, if possible, more activity than ever, the only difference being that now she wore a widow's cap, and flung back the strings of that, instead of the coloured ribbons in which she had been wont to look so fierce in Mr. Ferguson's time.



And indeed she said sometimes, in the strictest confidence, to cousin Tholthorpe, there was a certain satisfaction in knowing that things had passed the worst. She could do exactly as she chose now, and there was nobody to interfere with her. In poor dear William James's time, there was really never any telling what was going to happen next. One month he talked about resigning the pulpit altogether, and devoting himself to literary pursuits, than which a more foolish thing for a person in his position could not have been imagined, as a man who wrote for the press ought always to have a little income to fall back upon, and whilst old Mrs. Ferguson was living, he had not a penny but what his profession brought in. Then, scarcely had she recovered from the fever which such a proposition as that threw her into, when he began to talk about taking pupils, which was just as bad, seeing

that there was a flourishing Academy already kept in Dimplethorpe, by one of the leading members of the congregation, and he would be certain to withdraw from the church if anything was set up in opposition to him. Perhaps the next week both literature and pupils were given up, and he was going to write to the principal of his old college, to ask if there was a vacant charge anywhere, to which he could be recommended. Which there never was, for a man with a wife and five children wanted more stipend than most of the congregations in the small towns were disposed to give.

So that there was always so much uncertainty, and she supposed that preyed upon his mind. She was sure that, taking all things into consideration, there never were two people more comfortable together than herself and her husband, and she felt it a very great loss when they were called

upon to part ; but still she was enabled to look upon it in the light of a merciful release for him, situated, as he often said he was, amongst people who could not appreciate him properly, and with a mind so much above the common.

And now she did not believe she could show her respect for his memory in a more satisfactory way than by doing her best for the poor dear children he had left behind him. She could not have wished anything more providential than that orphanage for the twins ; and Rose Emma and Frances Ann were just the sort of girls to marry and settle early, which would be a great comfort to her. And so long as Audrey was doing well for herself at Miss Hart's—and she did not hear any complaints at present—she thought no one could say other of her than that she had proved herself everything that a widowed mother could be to her fatherless children.

And with that Mrs. Ferguson smoothed down her crape, and went to make some little arrangements for Mr. Vincent, who was expected that very evening.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. FERGUSON had not taken such a critical step as that of asking the young minister to board and lodge in her house, without careful inquiry first, as to who and what manner of man he was.

That inquiry had been quite successful. Mr. Vincent was a young man of good character and attainments, and his father and mother were dead, and he had a comfortable little property in the East Warrenshire Bank. The deacons had ascertained that beforehand, for they had decided on putting back their minister's stipend to its original level of a

hundred and fifty pounds, and therefore it was a satisfaction to know that, in the event of his speedily marrying and burdening himself with a family, as his predecessor had done, there would be no need for an immediate addition to his income.

That extra fifty pounds had been a great burden on them for eight or ten years past, with trade slackening as it was doing in Dimplethorpe, and some of the foremost members falling off; though probably Mr. Vincent would set that last difficulty right very soon, for, if report spoke correctly of him, he was just the man to build up a congregation; active both in the pulpit and out of it, and with none of those vague speculative notions, so far as they could make out, which had been so destructive to the interests of the church in the late minister's time. And a most delightful man in social intercourse. Mrs. Ferguson might

congratulate herself upon such a pleasant addition to her home circle, unless, as was probably the case, he was picked up before long by one or other of the young ladies of the congregation.

That contingency had entered Mrs. Ferguson's mind as well; but entered it, coupled with another, equally probable.

If Mr. Vincent had no young lady in his mind, why should he not fix upon Rose Emma or Frances Ann? True, there were other girls in the congregation who had the advantage of them, both in looks and fortune—indeed, as regarded that latter qualification, it was very easy to have the advantage of them—but then her girls had the advantage of knowing what was required from a minister's wife, having been brought up to it, as she might say, from their cradles. And they had, too, what was of still more importance, the opportunity of daily, inti-

mate home association with the minister, which might, under judicious supervision, result in a sincere attachment.

Mrs. Ferguson could not say, for her own part, which of the two girls would be most suitable. Rose Emma had a good complexion and a nice open disposition, and a pleasant way of going about amongst the people, which, in her poor dear papa's time, had made her a great favourite with them. But Frances Ann was far the best housekeeper of the two. Indeed, for managing servants and cooking up nice little dishes, and seeing that nothing was wasted in the house, she did not know where her equal was to be found, and that sort of thing was of great importance for a minister's wife. It went farther, sometimes, than an attractive way amongst the congregation. For it made such a difference to a man's temper having his food put down before him pro-



perly, and knowing that, whilst he gave himself to the work of the ministry, the money affairs would not be going to rack and ruin at home. Though, even for that, Rose Emma was not wasteful. She could keep house on as little as anybody, if there was a need for it. Still, being good-looking and that sort of thing, she did naturally think a little more about setting herself off than Frances Ann, whose gifts were in the domestic line.

As for Audrey, Mrs. Ferguson might say, metaphorically, that she was out of the running altogether. Mrs. Ferguson could not tell why or wherefore, but that girl did not really seem as if she belonged to the family at all. So very shiftless and unpractical. The only common-sense thing she had ever done was getting engaged as Miss Hart's head-teacher, and remaining in the situation as she did, with a promise that

she should get the drawing too, as soon as she could produce the necessary certificates from her master at Kensington. But for shyness, except with Miss Burnaby, who had begun to take a wonderful interest in her, and for never knowing how to put herself forward, or make the best of herself, Mrs. Ferguson did not believe any woman ever had such a daughter.

“She’s just her father over again, cousin Tholthorpe. Poor man, how he used to try me, to be sure, with his awkward ways amongst the people! The times and times I used to speak my mind to him about it; but you might as well have opened out to a stone wall. You never could get him to understand. However, poor dear, he is at rest now. I wouldn’t breathe a word against him.”

Mrs. Ferguson sighed. It was a tribute she paid occasionally to her husband’s

memory, though she was thankful to say she had been wonderfully sustained ever since his death. She might almost say she was quite herself again. Still there were times when she had, as she expressed it, a sense of bereavement, and then she comforted herself by remembering what an excellent wife and mother she had been, under circumstances which, to most women, would have been not a little trying.

The months went on. The family at the Moat House got over their first Christmas better than might have been expected, owing very much, Mrs. Ferguson said, to Mr. Vincent's kindness, for he was such a very pleasant, thoughtful young man, quite a privilege to have him in the house, and scarcely any trouble, though he could enjoy his meals, as every man ought to do, which made her think that of the two perhaps Frances Ann would be most suitable for

him. And then the snowdrops and crocuses peeped forth in Miss Burnaby's garden, and a golden splendour of iris blossoms shot up by the moat side. And in Audrey's scant holiday time—for she had got the certificates now, and was teaching drawing in addition to her other sorts of teaching at Miss Hart's school—she used to go down to that bit of sloping ground and work away at the picture she was making of the old Castle; the picture which was to tell Phil Hathaway, some of these days, how hard she had toiled, through loss and difficulty and pain, whilst he had been working with none of these things to vex him.

She never heard of him now, except through Miss Burnaby, with whom she still spent her Saturday afternoons. Miss Burnaby had quite got over that little prejudice about Dissent, and could afford to acknowledge, without a pang of

wounded pride, that Dimplethorpe parish church did not embrace within its high panelled oaken pews all of good breeding, intellect, worth, and refinement that the village possessed. She was willing to own, too, that she received as much as she gave, in her companionship with the quiet, gentle girl, who, in her own home and amongst her own people, seemed so little needed.

And indeed, now, Audrey was less needed at home than ever. Mr. Vincent had acted upon Mr. Polson's theories of matrimony. He had first satisfied himself that a wife would be a good thing for him, and then he had looked about him in a systematic, common-sense way, for the right lady. Under these circumstances, considerations of romance or sentiment not entering into the subject, where was he so likely to find her as in Mrs. Ferguson's own house? And there accordingly he did find her,

though for some time he was unable to decide between the respective merits of Rose Emma and Frances Ann. Providence, however, helped him to a selection. For young Mark Tewksby, only son of Mr. Tewksby, of the Moat Farm, was in search of a wife too ; and fate or fancy, or management, led him, as the latter had led Mr. Vincent, into the family of the late minister. And he, having always a leaning towards a fair complexion, decided, without much preliminary weighing of other qualifications, in favour of Rose Emma. Whereupon Mr. Vincent appropriated Frances Ann, and so the matter was settled.

But neither of the young couples were to be married just yet. Mr. Vincent thought he had better wait until he had been at least a year settled over the congregation; and young Tewksby's father was making arrange-

ments for placing him in a farm, of which he could not take possession until the Lady Day twelvemonth after his engagement to Rose Emma. So, considering the amount of courtship which was going on in the house, Audrey's presence could well be dispensed with, particularly as Mrs. Ferguson had society after her own heart in the companionship of cousin Tholthorpe, a thoroughly practical, managing, housekeeping sort of woman.

"It isn't that I don't love her as much as any of the others," Mrs. Ferguson said to her cousin, about six months after the late minister's death. "I'm thankful to say I'm a deal too good a mother to have any feeling of that sort, but it stands to reason that, when there's such a difference, you can't help seeing it. And Miss Burnaby taking such a fancy to her as she does, sets the house at liberty nicely for the rest of the

young people. Or else nobody should have it to say of me that I was partial. It's a thing I hate."

"Yes, Priscilla," said cousin Tholthorpe, solemnly, "you were always a person that did your duty, let you be situated as you might, and I don't deny but what you had a deal to go through in your poor husband's time. It is curious what a difference there is in people. It's a mercy, Priscilla, you've only one in the family of that sort. But Providence has come forward handsomely for you, I must say, seeing how you were circumstanced."

And Mrs. Tholthorpe looked down the road to where Mr. Vincent and Frances Ann were coming along, with the brisk and important air of newly-engaged people, who have not the least wish to conceal their satisfaction from the public. Indeed, there never had been any nonsense of that kind



about Frances Ann, from the very first. Nor with Rose Emma, either. They were common-sense, straightforward girls, and Providence had blessed them according to their deservings, so their mother said.

“Yes,” she replied, following Mrs. Tholthorpe’s cousinly gaze down the road. “I’m sure I may say that goodness and mercy have followed me, and it’s a satisfaction to think that poor dear William James is safe. It was a great anxiety to me, having everything to manage for the family as I did. And you can testify, cousin Tholthorpe, that I did manage everything to the best of my ability.”

Priscilla Tholthorpe said she *could* testify to that, no one better.

“Yes, and where we should have been if I hadn’t moved about amongst the members, and made them agreeable to that increase of salary, I don’t know. For, as I tell

Frances Ann, there's no limit to what a minister's wife may do, if she knows how to fill her place properly."

"She need only look to you, Priscilla, if she wants teaching how to do that."

Mrs. Ferguson adjusted her weepers, with the calm of a woman upon whose conscience there never rested the weight of an unfulfilled duty.

"Thank you, cousin Tholthorpe. I won't say that you're not justified in speaking from your heart. But Frances Ann won't be put to it as I was, and that's a mercy, with that nice little property of Mr. Vincent's secure to him in the Bank; but still, if she has the ability, it will be sure to come out somewhere. It's a great deal to keep well with the congregation, even when there isn't an increase to be desired, and I'm confident Frances Ann will see it her duty to be careful of that. They're a joy and a

pleasure to me, are both my girls, cousin Tholthorpe. A mother can't say more than that."

"No, nor needn't to," said appreciative Priscilla, number two.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE snowdrops came as aforetime, and the primroses, and the Lent lilies, and the yellow flag flowers. And Dimplethorpe blossomed into pink and white loveliness as regarded the wild roses in her hedgerows ; and then came reddening briony berries, and the bloomy purple sloes, and bramble sprays with touches of sunset crimson upon them, and the spikes of the speckled orchis shot up, coral-like, amongst the fallen leaves by the moat-side ; and Mr. Vincent and Frances Ann went boldly in broad daylight to the Dimplethorpe upholsterer's shop to

buy furniture; for why shouldn't they, and so what was the use of making a fuss about it? And Rose Emma and young Tewksby walked arm-in-arm to chapel every Sunday morning, and he sat with her in the minister's pew—Mrs. Ferguson, under the circumstances, still occupying it—and found the places for her in her hymn-book, or in various other ways proclaimed his attachment. And Audrey worked on bravely at her teaching—now principally of drawing—and brought home, term after term, certificates of merit from the art-school at Kensington, and went over every Saturday afternoon to the Manor House, where it would be hard to tell whether she or Miss Burnaby had a pleasanter time of it. And Meadowfield Lodge was unlet still.

As Dr. Fylingdale said, he had had serious thoughts of going into it himself, if Michaelmas brought him no tenant. For the house

had now been standing finished and empty for exactly two and a half years, during which time the creepers had grown up beautifully round the columns of the verandah on the village side, and the ivy—there never was such a place as Dimplethorpe for ivy—had crept as nearly as possible to the notice-board on the top of the bay-window. It really was a pretty place, and it was a thousand pities nobody seemed to want it. Dr. Fylingdale certainly would have gone into it, only, unfortunately, with a haste and disregard of consequences which could scarcely have been expected from a man of his age, he had pushed matters to a crisis with Miss Burnaby, and the pretty little lady had given him an answer which effectually barred him from that end of Dimplethorpe, unless he could previously find a Mrs. Fylingdale somewhere else.

For Miss Burnaby had told him that she

had not the least thought of leaving her brother. They were exceedingly happy and comfortable together, and she had no other wish than to spend the remainder of her days with him. She was very sorry that anything had induced Dr. Fylingdale to make such a proposal. She hoped that he would endeavour to forget as speedily as possible that anything of the sort had ever been said, though at the same time it need not interfere with the friendly feeling which had subsisted between them ever since he came to the place.

Dr. Fylingdale hoped it would not, for there wasn't a pleasanter house in Dimplethorpe to eat one's dinner in, once a month or so. At the same time, it would scarcely be possible, even if it had been seemly, the very week after Miss Burnaby's courteous refusal, to go and plant himself right opposite her front-door, and so perhaps offend her, and

make her break off the intimacy altogether. He was fain, therefore, to remain at the other end of the village, disappointed both in heart and purse; and the notice-board on the top of the bay-window of Meadowfield Lodge still proclaimed to high and low, rich and poor, that if anyone did want a genteel family residence, here it was ready for them.

But one morning, late in March, when that unfortunate villa was nearly accomplishing its third year of emptiness, Miss Burnaby turned out as usual, first thing after breakfast, to take a tour round her garden, and was suddenly aware of something missing amongst the familiar objects upon which her eyes had been accustomed so long to rest.

Spring opened cheerlessly that year, but now a burst of sunshine had come after east wind and rain, and everything was getting



ready to rush into bud and blossom as fast as possible. But Miss Burnaby had watched that sort of thing before, and it had not smitten upon her with the sense of strangeness she felt now.

She took off her spectacles and rubbed them, and put them on again, and trotted round the garden to find out where the difference could be. It was not like that sudden—silent change which comes sometimes, when Nature, after a long sleep, makes one great bound, and before one can tell where one is, the trees are all bursting into leaf, and the lilacs, which were brown twigs one day, have put on their beautiful April raiment the next. Miss Burnaby went to look at those lilacs. They were brown twigs, nothing more. Then she examined her apricots. Could the change be in them? No, for not a blossom had opened since, the day before, she had counted them so

carefully. Nor was it that a blight had come, such as cut off all the peaches last year, for she rubbed her spectacles again, and went across the garden to make sure that that was not the case. The blossoms were all there, as right as a fiddle, to use the old gardener's words. Then what was it?

Miss Burnaby, after one more round of investigation, decided that she had better go into the house and consult her brother about it.

“Jack, do just come out a minute, will you? There is something wrong in the garden, and I can't, for the life of me, make out what it is. There's something that doesn't look a bit like itself somehow. It caught me as soon as ever I went out at the front door. We'll go out that way now, and perhaps you will find what it is. Everybody says you have such a wonderfully quick eye.”

“All right, Jane,” said the old General, laying down his morning pipe, and dislodging a couple of fine tabby cats who were stretching themselves before the fire, one on each knee. “If it’s anything that’s been stolen out of the garden, I warrant it doesn’t escape *me*.”

To the front door they went, and, keenly as though he had been reconnoitring a battle-field, the old man’s eye swept round that trim, tidy, well-kept little plot of garden-ground.

“Why, Jane!” he exclaimed, “as sure as my name is Jack Burnaby, old Fylingdale’s board is down. What on earth’s the matter? The old simpleton can’t be coming to live at it himself.”

A dainty blush overspread Miss Burnaby’s cheek. If he did, it would be exceedingly annoying.

And she began, there and then, to con-

sider how she might most conveniently migrate to a bedroom at the back of the house, or at any rate have her toilet-table removed from its present place in front of the window. For of course Dr. Fylingdale would occupy a room to the front himself, and in that case she could not slip upstairs to adjust her cap without running the risk of seeing him perform the same kind of office for his own wig, at the dressing-table of that very window which, for the last three years nearly, had been half hidden by the notice-board. It was a most thoughtless thing of him to do. Unless he meant to insult her.

Because, of course, it never occurred to either of them that Meadowfield Lodge could really be let.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Jane," said the General, at last. "I'll go down to Craybrook, the builder, and hear what he

says about it. Perhaps, after all, they've only carried off the board to paint it up a bit. It's coming about to the time of year for that, you know. You'll see it up again to-morrow morning, same as usual, for another six months."

Jack started, and Miss Burnaby went upstairs to consider the matter of the toilet-table. Her brother might say what he liked, just to set her mind at rest, but she had a firm conviction that Dr. Fylingdale was coming to the Lodge himself. It was most annoying. She must say she had given him credit for more gentlemanly feeling. And when he might have recollected how frequently they must encounter each other, for there was no back way to the Lodge. Everybody, from the butcher's boy to the vicar himself, who went to the house at all, must go to it by that carriage-gate, exactly opposite her own. She must move her

looking-glass to the side of the window, and have a short muslin blind put up—short muslin blinds were her abomination, next to open chimneys,—and never draw the venetians until she was properly dressed, instead of being able, as she had been up to the present time, to peep out at any stage of her toilet and see what sort of a morning it was. Very annoying of Dr. Fylingdale, very annoying indeed.

But the General came back with a different story. Dr. Fylingdale was not coming to live at the Lodge at all.

“It’s somebody else, Jane. I didn’t think he would make such a donkey of himself. He has done that quite enough already.”

“*Jack!*” said his sister, with a slight show of dignity.

It did not argue a man quite a donkey to have so appreciated herself. One must

allow him the possession of a little sense, if only in that one particular.

“I beg your pardon, Jane. I meant, you know, that he needn't have wanted to fly his kite quite so high. But I'm very glad, at the same time, that he is not coming to live at Meadowfield Lodge.”

“Then who is it, Jack?”

“Well, you're not quite out of the bush, Jane, though I don't think you've any reason to be alarmed. You remember poor Charley Haythorne?”

“Well, yes, Jack,” said Miss Burnaby, with another little blush, not of annoyance, but of what might almost be called self-reproach. “But he must be dead ever so long ago. Indeed, I'm sure he is.”

“Yes, and so am I, and this is his son. A Major and Mrs. Haythorne have taken the Lodge. He is home on leave from Bombay, and I suppose his wife and little boy are

going to stay in the house after he returns to his regiment. So you will have to call, you know."

"Of course I shall call, Jack. You never knew me wanting in respect, either to the army or navy."

"Except when you sent poor Charlie about his business, let me see, how many years ago, eh, Jane? Getting on for fifty, I should think."

"Well, perhaps I *was* a little hard upon him, Jack, but what can you do when a man worries you so?"

"I don't know. No one ever did worry *me* in that way. But it is curious that we should light upon the family again."

"I don't believe it is the same, Jack. At least, I almost hope it isn't."

"Oh! yes, it is. Haythorne isn't such a common name. I remember hearing about Charlie afterwards. He married somebody



with a lot of money, and Squire Bentham told me he sent his son into the artillery. It's the very same, Jane, so there's an introduction for you at once, if you like to mention the circumstance."

And the old General went back to his pipe and the tabbies. He enjoyed a joke with his sister, and she did not mind it either, especially when it had reference to her conquests in the olden time.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE very next morning a fly drove up to the garden gate of Meadowfield Lodge. Miss Burnaby was out amongst her apricot blossoms when she heard the sound of wheels, and, as soon as they stopped, she hurried up as fast as her feet would carry her to her own front window, in order to have a view of whoever was getting out. But, to her disappointment, they were inside the house before she could so much as see who they were. She planted herself there with her knitting, determined to sit it out until they made their appearance again ; but,

as ill-luck would have it, the vicar chose that morning, of all others, to make one of his longest calls, and, whilst he was making it, she heard, with feelings of regret to which she dared not give utterance, the cab drive away again. Never had she enjoyed a vicarial visit so little, because, in a general way, Mr. Laxby was a most entertaining man. But she did so want to see what Charlie's son was like.

It was a great convenience now that that sycamore-tree had blown down, for by going to the window in one gable of the Manor House, Miss Burnaby commanded, through the gap at that end of the garden, a good view of one end of the new house; and from her own bed-room she could look up the gravel sweep to the front door, and the bay window on the right-hand side of the house. So that she had nothing to do but sit first in one room and then in

another, and note what went on opposite.

She did wish they could have asked old Dr. Fylingdale over to a rubber of backgammon, and asked him all about everything: what sort of a man the Major was; where his wife came from; whether they had taken the house on lease, or by the year, together with a great many other little matters. But, of course, under the circumstances, that was impossible. They must be coming in at once though, for the very day after that fly drove up the paperers arrived with their steps and stretchers and paste-buckets, and fires were lighted, and she could see them working away from morning to night, as if they were doing it for a wager.

Very curious. For she was quite sure Dr. Fylingdale had told her the house *was* papered from top to bottom. But perhaps Mrs. Haythorne was a lady of taste, who

liked to choose her own patterns ; and the doctor was not a man whose judgment, as regarded paper-hangings, could be taken as worth much, whatever might be said of it when applied to the selection of a wife. If she could but have stepped across and taken a look round, but Dr. Fylingdale was always about the place. If she saw his withered old face peering behind its high shirt-collars once a day in the empty rooms, she saw it at least a dozen times, and she would rather wait until doomsday, to know what patterns Mrs. Haythorne had chosen than find out at the risk of meeting the landlord of Meadowfield Lodge, after what had passed between them. It was a nuisance.

Then the vans, three of them. Miss Burnaby spent the whole morning watching those vans being emptied. Such pretty pieces of old carved oak furniture, such quaint oval mirrors. And the packing cases,

with Bombay and Calcutta in great black letters upon them ; china, most likely, and oriental curiosities, as the Major was just home from India. And picture-cases, almost any number of them, and an easel. Mrs. Haythorne had artistic tendencies then, or was it the Major? And a harp and a piano, and then a rocking-horse. And as the rocking-horse was brought out of the van, a little black-haired boy, with a nurse in attendance upon him, came capering out to meet it, and insisted upon having a ride on it there and then, before ever it was taken into the house. A handsome little lad, but spoiled, surely, as if the furniture men had nothing to do but stand grinning at him until his morning gallop, which he chose to take exactly in front of the van door, was ended.

As if by magic, things got into shape when once those vans were unloaded. Next morning, when Miss Burnaby peeped out

at nine o'clock, there were pink-striped holland blinds to the windows, and hanging baskets, with flowers in them, were suspended from the verandah, and foliage plants, with the most artistic-looking terra-cotta vases, were filling the space which the notice board had occupied so long; and by the end of five days, one might think the house had been inhabited for a year, so cosy and comfortable did it look. But no sign of Major or Mrs. Haythorne. However they would make their appearance at church on Sunday. Miss Burnaby could content herself until then.

And they did make their appearance, accordingly.

To say that Miss Burnaby's attention, during that Sunday morning service, was scrupulously fixed upon her devotions, would be saying a great deal too much. But if it did wander it only wandered in common with that of the rest of the female part of

the congregation. Indeed such wandering was only natural, for as, during the last twenty or thirty years, no one had voluntarily chosen Dimplethorpe as a place of residence, its inhabitants felt themselves bound to take more than ordinary interest in the manners and appearance of any tolerably well-bred people who had shown such an uncommon preference for their little village.

Major and Mrs. Haythorne came in very early, so that Miss Burnaby, who had done the same, found time enough to take notice of them leisurely, before the service began. The pew-opener showed them into the seat next behind Squire Bentham himself, thus evincing a fine perception of their social position. You may always trust the pew-opener of a secluded country parish church for separating between the false and the true in the various sorts of "quality people" who come within the exercise of his function. It



is only your vulgar town-beadle who puts velvet and feathers into his front seats, and relegates Norman features under a two-year old bonnet to uncushioned pews at the back.

They entered quietly, taking apparently no more notice of anything or anybody than if they had sat in the same place and looked upon the same congregation, Sunday after Sunday, for a dozen years. Well-bred people—Miss Burnaby could see that at a glance, as well as the pew-opener. Major Haythorne was a tall, handsome man, just enough like poor Charlie to convince her that he did belong to the same family, and yet so different as to make the pretty old lady sigh as she turned over the leaves of her Prayer-book, and thought what might have been.

For, fifty years ago, Charlie—poor Charlie dead and done for now nearly a quarter of a century, nay, much more than that—

was a jolly, care-for-nothing young fellow, with a shirt-collar open here, and a tie flying there, and loose brown curls tumbling about in all directions, and an easy indifference as to the cut of his coat and the shape of his hat, which used to vex her a little then, but which she had learned since to prefer rather than otherwise in a man. And this Major Haythorne, Charlie's son, would have made a water-wagtail look untidy by comparison with him. Not a hair was out of place on his closely-cropped head and long drooping moustache. The line of starched and glossy white which appeared above the collar of his morning-coat, and again at its cuffs, might have been measured by rule and compasses, so exactly was it of the same width all along. As for his black satin tie, polished marble could perhaps have vied with it for immovable regularity of outline, but there the marble

must stop—the black satin would have carried the day. And when Major Haythorne stood up, and when Major Haythorne sat down, and when Major Haythorne did his Maker the homage of kneeling, it was with the air of a man for whom *comme il faut* is life's supreme aim.

“Not a bit like Charlie,” said Miss Burnaby to herself, and her thoughts travelled back to the long-ago days when, a somewhat prim and particular damsel, wearing her India muslin and long silk mittens, in that same old Manor House where now, grey-haired and spectacled, she was settling down to a peaceful eventide, she had turned away from the curly soldier lad because his ways were too off-hand, and his collars not neat enough. Poor Charlie! And he had gone with never a word more. And the next she heard of him was that he was married, and then that he was dead.

Miss Burnaby could not bear tidy men now. She said it was a sign of narrow-mindedness. She would not have been half so happy with her own brother Jack if she had not had to look after him and straighten him up a dozen times a day. She might be right, or she might be wrong, but the one man she remembered above all others, and would remember to the day of her death, was that curly soldier lad, whose gloves were always anywhere but on his hands, and who never knew where to find his cap, and who, when he had found it, could never make it stick straight on, because of the tossing brown hair, which she told him was so irregular and unmilitary.

And this Major Haythorne, smooth and starched and polished to the very pink of perfection, was Charlie's son. If his father ever had taught him tidiness, his own want of it having cost him so dearly, the

Major at forty had bettered the lesson.

Miss Burnaby watched him, and lived that little bit of her girlish life over again, until the congregation stood up for the first hymn; and then Mrs. Haythorne, crossing over to get out of the way of the sunlight which came in at that corner of the square pew, recalled her to the fact that there was another stranger to be taken notice of.

Mrs. Haythorne was a lady-like little woman, small and neat and well finished—indeed the Major could have married none other—with fine greyhound features, and large brown eyes. Not melancholy eyes, not discontented eyes; but Miss Burnaby, meeting them for a moment as the two ladies rose simultaneously at the commencement of that first hymn, felt in that very moment that they were the eyes of a woman who had not found what she wanted in her husband.

And indeed, thought Miss Burnaby, how could she find what she wanted, if she sought for anything beyond mathematical precision and regularity of outline in the man she had chosen to live her life with ?

The old lady watched her more attentively after that. At sixty-eight, Miss Burnaby had still a romantic interest in imagining histories about married women, whose faces did not tell either of common-place house-keeperly content, or of that strange quietness, strange because so rare, which comes of restful love.

And Mrs. Haythorne's told of neither. Her husband was scrupulously attentive to her, arranged her cushions, found the places in her prayer-book with the tact of an accomplished squire of dames. But though courteously acknowledging all that he did, there was no light in her brown eyes when they met his, none of that unconscious

sweetness which shines through the faces of people whose joy it is to be with each other. It was his place to give these attentions. It was hers to receive. Nothing more than that.

How old was she? Had she married him for a position? Had she had a disappointment in early life, and so taken up with him, merely for the sake of being "settled" as many women do, finding a sort of jog-trot comfort in the arrangement, when once the better part of their nature has been laid to sleep? Yet it could not be that, for though there was no bitterness in her face, neither was there any of the full-fed content of the successful matron. Perhaps, then, she had been forced into it, and was making the best of her bargain, in a courteous, half scornful fashion. Or she might have married him, fancying herself in love, and then, having found out her mistake,

had to bear its consequences, like many another woman, whom her friends consider as in the highest degree successful.

At any rate there was something uncomfortable. Mrs. Haythorne was not happy, or, if she was, she had a curious way of showing it.

Miss Burnaby let her thoughts travel into all sorts of conjectures, discarding first one and then another as not the correct one, until a sudden uprising of the congregation aroused her to the fact that Mr. Laxby had come to the end of his sermon. She had never been so inattentive at church in her life before, at least never since those Sunday mornings, now nearly fifty years ago, when Charlie used to sit beside her, and try, in his simple, awkward fashion, to pay her those cavalierly little acts of homage which this stranger lady received so coldly from Major Haythorne.



## CHAPTER XXI.

TOWARDS the end of that week, Jane went across to call upon the new people, taking with her her brother's card, the old General not being a man who ever went out on such errands. He liked well enough to have a man over of an evening, for a cigar or a rubber, and he did not mind a leisurely stroll with a friend up towards the East Warrenshire hills, to catch a glimpse of the hounds, who sometimes had a run across that part of the country; but as for sprucing himself up and setting off on a round of pasteboard non-

sense, he was long past it, even if the ladies to be called upon were fifty times prettier or more fascinating than Mrs. Haythorne.

“I don’t know for the fascination, Jack, but I’m sure you never called upon anybody prettier, not even in the —th, where you said the officers’ wives were all such beauties. Mrs. Haythorne is the handsomest woman I have seen in Dimplethorpe since the Berry-Fontenoy’s went away.”

“She may be as handsome as Venus, Jane, I’m not going to call upon her, at my time of life. You can say something nice for me. Nobody can do that better than yourself, and if they seem likely to turn out pleasant people, we will have them over to dinner one of these evenings. But I’m not going to call, and there’s an end of it.”

Miss Burnaby went. Before she came away, she had made up her mind that her second theory was the correct one, namely,

that Mrs. Haythorne had been forced into marrying her husband, and that she was trying to make the best of it.

Only her way of making the best of it was by having everything around her as beautiful and tasteful as possible. She was very graceful in her manners, and courteous, even to sweetness. Miss Burnaby thought that, if she had been a happier woman, she would have shown it in sparkling playfulness; for there was a hint of that even now, when any turn in the conversation gave room for it. She was very clever, there was no doubt about that, only sometimes there was just the least little touch of satire about her, so that you could not quite tell whether she meant all she said. And it was that touch of satire or sarcasm sometimes, which gave Miss Burnaby the impression that she was a disappointed woman.

The house was simply lovely. Not that there was anything extravagant about it, but everything was arranged with such taste. The rooms might have been lived in for years, so cosily had each piece of furniture settled down into its place, and so little varnish of newness was there about the house. Such pretty sketches on the walls, in crayon and water-colour, and the most exquisite groups of bamboo and plantain leaves, arranged as panels for the doors. Then the Indian and Japanese curiosities; quaint old cabinets and bronzes, and bits of Bombay ebony furniture; in short, a mingled atmosphere of sandal-wood and culture seemed to surround you as soon as you entered the place.

If Miss Burnaby thought from the first that Mrs. Haythorne's marriage was not a happy one, she was still more convinced of it when Major Haythorne entered the

room, spotless, irreproachable as one of the wax figures in a London barber's shop, and indeed with not much more expression in his face, save that the finely chiselled nose and retreating chin stamped him unmistakably as belonging to the upper classes.

A subtle change passed over his wife's face as he entered, after she had been in conversation with Miss Burnaby for a few minutes. It was not coldness, nor dislike, nor temper, nor annoyance; it was simply weariness. And when the handsome wax figure broke into speech, one could quite understand that weariness, for never surely did the accents of Vere de Vere cover such a hopeless deep of commonplace. Major Haythorne evidently thought that, with such an exterior as his own, nothing further could possibly be required.

"My brother asked me to bring his apologies," Miss Burnaby began. "He

scarcely ever goes out to call now, but he hopes to make your acquaintance before long. I think we ought not to be quite strangers. We knew Captain Haythorne of the —th."

"Dear me!" said the Major, pulling one of his wristbands down a little, to match the line of the other. "You don't say so. Curious coincidence, 'pon my word. Only fancy, Delphine!"

And he turned to his wife.

"Fancy the General knowing poor Pa. It really is odd how one finds somebody everywhere that knew somebody else. Isn't it?"

"Most remarkable," said Mrs. Haythorne, with a touch of contempt. "It proves that the world is not so very wide, after all." And then she added, turning to Miss Burnaby, with a less cold light in her eyes, "It ought to make us better neigh-

bours, ought it not? For my own part, I don't know a creature here, and I was very nearly saying I don't care to know one either, only you know——”

“Oh! yes,” said the good-hearted little woman, “I know exactly what you mean. I think everyone must have that sort of feeling in going to a strange place, though I have never experienced it myself, because I have lived here all my life. But you will soon get over it, Mrs. Haythorne. Dimplethorpe is such a friendly little place. You will feel quite at home in it after a few weeks.”

“I daresay you are quite right. After being abroad for a few years, one can make oneself at home almost anywhere in England. You have so much to begin with, in being in your own country at all. I had a sort of feeling in church last Sunday that the people here were pleasant. You know how one

does get hold of that sort of feeling sometimes, without being able to account for it. Though really the place does not look interesting. I should think artists do not often visit it."

Miss Burnaby had plenty to say now. That remark opened a fine vein of conversation.

"Well, I don't know that many artists come to the place from choice, but we are beginning to be rather proud of a young man who went out from here a few years ago, and who promises to be quite an honour to the village. His grandfather was a basket-maker here."

"Dear me!" said the lady, carelessly. "And does he still make Dimplethorpe his home?"

"Well, I can scarcely say that, as he is studying now on the Continent. He took a scholarship in London, which gave him three



years in Rome or Paris, and the three years do not expire until next autumn. I assure you we are quite proud of looking at the little cottage where he made his first sketches amongst the osier bundles."

"I should think so. But he will scarcely be wise if he comes back and establishes himself in the place. It is always better for a young man to get away from such surroundings."

There was a flavour of bitterness in Mrs. Haythorne's voice as she said this. But evidently the Major shared her sentiments.

"You are quite right, Delphine. And when a young man of that sort tries to get into society, it is such a nuisance. How bored we used to be in Paris with some of those people!"

Mrs. Haythorne flung her eyes away from him.

"I shall certainly try to make his ac-

quaintance, Miss Burnaby, if he comes here. I have no patience"—and she turned a look of defiance upon her husband, which might or might not be playful—"I have no patience with that vulgarity which sets itself above art, simply because the art does not happen to have been born in its own sphere."

"Exactly so," said Miss Burnaby. "I am sure whenever Philip Hathaway comes back here, he will be welcome in the best society of the place."

And then—for she was afraid Mrs. Haythorne might say something sharp—she changed the conversation.

"I daresay you would admire our little church. We are rather proud of that, as well as of our artist. It is genuine Early English, and not restored, either."

"Yes. I found that out. But really anything looks lovely after the horrible

whitewash of Bombay. I cannot say, however, that I found the sermon so interesting as the architecture."

"Probably not. But we are all very fond of dear old Mr. Laxby. He is quite a gentleman, and reads the prayers so nicely; and he is so kind to the poor."

"Oh! yes. You can tell that at once," said Mrs. Haythorne.

"Quite the air of a man of family," echoed the Major, picking up a stray leaf from the carpet, and then carefully wiping his wristband with a cambric handkerchief. For Floss, a little Pomeranian dog, labouring under the delusion that its master had meant to give it a pat when he stooped down, had, in the excess of its affection, licked his hand, and the pretty tongue had touched that immaculate linen.

Again Mrs. Haythorne looked bored.

"And then," she continued, "what is that

queer little building in the principal street, with pointed windows, and a text over the door? I should have taken it for a meeting-house, only in a small place like this you scarcely seem to need anything over and above the authorised means of grace."

"Oh, yes! we do. At any rate, we have something over. That is the Independent chapel. And we should never have found out that we had an artist amongst us, if it had not been for poor Mr. Ferguson, the minister of that chapel. He was a very superior man, his sermons were twice as good as Mr. Laxby's, though I never went to hear them, and he had a great talent for painting. Indeed, everyone said it was a shame he had not been allowed to become an artist himself. And he happened to find Philip Hathaway sketching amongst the osier flats one day, and he took an interest in him, and used to give him lessons three

times a week ; and after that he got him sent to London, to attend the art-classes there, and that was the beginning of Phil's success. Poor Mr. Ferguson is dead now, and there is some one, a Mr. somebody—I really forget who—in his place, not half so clever, I believe, for nobody ever hears anything about him. But that is of no consequence to you, for I suppose you will not go to the chapel.”

“Of course not,” said Major Haythorne, smoothing his long moustache.

Mrs. Haythorne looked him quietly in the face.

“I do not see any ‘of course’ in it, Fred. I really cannot understand why we may not take advantage of anything which rises above the dead level of mediocrity. I feel a very strong inclination to go over next Sunday morning, and hear what the apostle of this little Bethel has to say.”

"Oh, certainly, my dear," replied the Major, who, whatever else he might be, was certainly not a tyrannical husband, "so long as you do not expect me to go. I—well, you know, I am not exactly accustomed to that sort of thing."

"Yes, I know that very well," said Mrs. Haythorne, in a tone which implied that not only with regard to little Bethels, but with regard to the entire range of his mental vision, her husband was not accustomed to anything above the dead level of mediocrity. "You can stay at home. I don't in the least mind about going alone. But I quite forgot, though, Miss Burnaby, you say this clever Mr. Ferguson is dead. What a pity!"

"Yes, poor man! He has been dead more than a year. He was too clever for the place, no one could understand him, and he lived a most lonely life. His eldest

daughter inherits a great deal of his talent. She teaches drawing in a school here. I believe she would have been rather a good artist if she could have given all her time to it. But she has had to earn her own living since her father's death, and indeed before."

"Poor thing! I wish I could help her. I daresay she has not much sympathy in her own home. And one could not wish a drearier lot than that for any woman."

The Major stroked his moustache again, but said nothing. Miss Burnaby felt quite hot. She was sure, if he had any sense at all, he must have taken the remark as personal. She was wondering what to talk about next, when little Master Haythorne, the only child of the house, after much remonstrance on the part of his nurse, first whispered and then more distinctly audible, burst into the room. A fine little fellow,

with bold, brown eyes and any amount of determination in his face.

“Victor,” said his mamma, looking proudly at him, for indeed he was a pretty boy. “And when I have told you you are never to disturb me in an afternoon. Pray what brought you here?”

“My own inclination, Mamma,” said Master Victor, with great self-possession. “Mathilde *is* such a muff.”

Mrs. Haythorne looked at Miss Burnaby.

“Isn’t he a little Pagan? But really it is more Mathilde’s fault than anything else. She has not the least tact with children. I do wish I could find some clever, good-tempered lady who would come to me and take the entire charge of him. It would be such a blessing both to me and Victor. You know——”

But just then the vicar, Mr. Laxby, was



announced, and as Miss Burnaby's call had already exceeded the orthodox fifteen minutes, she took her leave.

## CHAPTER XXII.

ONE question kept asking itself in Miss Burnaby's thoughts all the rest of that afternoon.

“Why on earth did she marry him?”

For there was something about Mrs. Haythorne which stamped her as a superior woman. She was very refined, very artistic—the arrangements of her home betokened that—and very clever, too. Not that she had said anything remarkable during that fifteen minutes' call, but you might gather well enough from her manner that she *could* say remarkable things if she liked, and perhaps sharp ones too.

Then the books scattered carelessly about were not of the sort one generally found on the tables of the Dimplethorpe ladies. And if, as appeared to be the case, Mrs. Haythorne did not find much companionship at home, so far as intellect went, she would not be likely to find it abroad.

Miss Burnaby felt very sorry for her. If she had been what is called a clever woman herself, she would have been delighted with her new neighbour; but what could she do for a lady who sketched in crayons, and painted in water colours, and could decorate the panels of her doors with etchings of bamboo and plantain leaves, and read Schiller and Goethe, and was so much in advance of the prejudices of her class as to talk about going to the Independent chapel—that last thing showed superiority of mind, if you like—and who could invest everything about her with an air

of refinement and taste so different from the Chippendale spindliness of upper Dimplethorpe in general? Miss Burnaby could but admire at a distance.

But she might perhaps do something more to the purpose than mere admiration. Mrs. Haythorne had spoken of a governess for little Master Victor. Now if little Master Victor had his mother's character, as well as his mother's big brown eyes, he was certainly considerably more than a match for the moon-faced Miss Mathilde, who had the management of him now. And who so capable to undertake the training of him as Audrey Ferguson?

Audrey was working quite too hard for her strength at Miss Hart's school. She had often said how much she would prefer having one or two children to teach during the daytime, so that she might have her evenings for painting. Quiet, retiring though she was,

she had any amount of strength of character about her, and could keep Master Victor in his place effectually enough, as well as be a most congenial companion to his mother. Miss Burnaby thought she could not do Mrs. Haythorne and Audrey a greater kindness than by introducing them to each other in this way. But she would consult Jack first.

Jack saw it in the same light. He said he didn't think there could be a better arrangement, for if Mrs. Haythorne was as pleasant and clever as Jane's description made her out to be, she would be thankful enough to have a lady like Audrey Ferguson in her house ; and Audrey would get her afternoons thrice a week for the art classes in London, and have all her evenings for work at home, which was just what she wanted.

"You're a real good little soul, Jane, and I hope you'll be able to make it all come square," said the old General, as Miss

Burnaby put on her bonnet next morning and went off to talk the matter over with Audrey at Miss Hart's.

Audrey was quite willing. She had already told Miss Hart that she was only remaining with her until some one could be found in her place, who did not want so much time for independent study. Old Mrs. Ferguson had again proposed her going to living in London, but then she would not be earning anything, and she was minded not to be a burden to her mother. To get some nice quiet engagement in Dimplethorpe was the very thing she wanted.

"Then, my dear, I'll write to Mrs. Haythorne to-day, as soon as ever I get home, and, if I'm not very much mistaken, she will find that a piece of great good luck has fallen in her way. For, Audrey, I don't want to flatter you, but I've thought for this

long time past that you're the cleverest girl in Dimplethorpe, and, if you could be kept in the place, it seems a pity for you to leave it. I like clever people, though I'm as blunt as a wool needle myself. I'll let you know as soon as I hear from Mrs. Haythorne."

Miss Burnaby did write, according to promise, and her note brought Major and Mrs. Haythorne over the very next afternoon, though Mrs. Haythorne did not enter upon the subject directly, the old General being in the room when they arrived. She at once fell into a bright, easy conversation with him, leaving the Major to be entertained by his sister.

And what a task that was! If Miss Burnaby had said to herself, as she came home from the Lodge, "Why on earth did she marry him?" she said it with fifty times more wonder when she had had the privi-

lege of ten minutes' undisturbed conversation with Mrs. Haythorne's husband. For when one had finished admiring the droop of his moustache, and the fine lines in the bridge of his nose, and the haste with which that retreating chin buried itself behind a collar spotless and glossy as six pennyworth of Ackerman's superfine cardboard, there was really so little else to admire. Life appeared as if it would be quite too much of a struggle for the Major if he were required to do anything but smile and adjust his wristbands, and acquiesce in Miss Burnaby's pleasant little remarks about the weather and the prettiness of the place.

Her brother was getting on much better with Mrs. Haythorne. He did not in a general way care much for ladies' society, but he was evidently now falling a victim, if not to his new neighbour's cleverness, at least to her pretty brown eyes and sparkling



smile, and readiness to be pleased by him. She was one of those women who appear to their best advantage when in the society of gentlemen. Not that she was not excessively pleasant to her own sex, nothing could have been more delightful than her manners with Miss Burnaby during that first call; but still there was a difference, and Miss Burnaby noticed it, and noticed it still more because of the contrast it presented to the exceedingly monotonous style of the conversation which was going on between herself and the Major.

She did not get in a single word about Audrey until she and her brother were escorting their guests down the laurel walk to the Manor House gate. Then Jack, for the first time, began to talk to the Major, and Mrs. Haythorne fell back upon Miss Burnaby.

“It was so kind of you to write to me

about Miss Ferguson. I should be so glad if she would come. I am only afraid, as she is so clever, she would find us dreadfully dull ; but I am sure I would do everything in my power to make things pleasant for her. Would she come over to-morrow afternoon, do you think, and have a cup of tea with me, and we could arrange it ?”

Miss Burnaby said she would ask her. She did not think there would be any difficulty about it.

“ Thank you so much. Victor is a positive load upon my mind just now. I have so little notion of managing him, and one gets so tired of always having a child about. The thought came into my mind the other day, almost as soon as you had gone, but I did not like to ask you. And very clever in painting, did you not say ? or something of that sort.”

“ Oh, yes ! very clever. And as refined

and superior in her manners as possible. The only thing, you know, is, that her mother and sisters live in the place, and being mixed up, you know, with that little chapel—I thought perhaps—well, you understand. Some people might have a feeling about it.”

“Yes; but I assure you I haven’t, in the least. So long as people are clever and companionable, it is not the slightest consequence to me whether their friends belong to the Church of England or not. If Miss Audrey will be good enough to take Victor in hand, I will do everything I can to make her happy. I assure you she will be more like a sister to me than anything else.”

Miss Burnaby liked that. Not that she could have said such a thing herself, having still a few of those open sewers of prejudice wandering about in the background of her character. Perhaps no one in Dimplethorpe

appreciated Audrey Ferguson more than she did, but at the same time she liked Audrey to know that there *was* a difference between them. She had been brought up to consider the Church of England as the only respectable religious institution afloat, and people outside it needed a very exceptional amount of talent and refinement to bring them up to a level with even the most slenderly gifted of those who dwelt within its sacred enclosure. Audrey had that refinement, and so one could associate with her ; but she was outside of the ring fence, all the same.

At least those were Miss Burnaby's feelings. They might be prejudices, as she said to Jack sometimes, but if so, she could not help it ; there they were. She had been brought up with them, she could not cast them off. Other people need not agree with them, unless they chose. And so long as she held her prejudices on such liberal principles, she

thought she had a perfect right to them.

However before the end of the month, Audrey was settled as daily governess at Meadowfield Lodge. And what was more, Mrs. Haythorne kept her promise of being like a sister to her. For never before, since her father died, had the girl known such real sense of companionship as came to her in those quiet afternoons when the teaching was done, and she and the Major's wife sat together in the little inner drawing-room, painting or reading, the Major meanwhile slumbering in the dining-room over his London or Indian papers.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

“**A**ND the General has had a letter from Phil, Audrey, my dear.”

This was another of Miss Burnaby's innocent, old-fashioned prejudices; that with people whom she did not consider as in every respect on the same social level with herself, her brother should be spoken of as “the General.”

In talking to the vicar, who was one of the Laxby family, or Squire Bentham, or Mrs. Lastingham the widowed daughter of the late vicar, or even Dr. Fylingdale, when they were more intimate with him, the old

man was simply "Jack." With the lawyer and surgeon, and the curate, and other entirely well-bred people, who attended the parish church regularly, he was "my brother." But beyond a line which was drawn from the young curate downwards, embracing, as it descended, Audrey Ferguson, Miss Hart, Miss Parley, Mrs. Frogston, and a great many other persons of that kind, it was "the General." And Miss Burnaby would have felt that an impertinence had been committed, had any of these afore-mentioned ladies, when needing to mention her brother's name at all, designated him as other than "the General." Even "General Burnaby" was not sufficient, for that implied that they occasionally had to do with others of the same rank, whereas she knew very well that there was no one else in Dimplethorpe who had a right to carry the cocked hat and white plume of Her

Majesty's service, and therefore the definite article was the least that could be accorded him.

Now Audrey, by reason of her grandfather on the maternal side having conducted a comfortable business in the grocery line, was distinctly one of those who ought to use the definite article. And her father too, though head and shoulders above Dimplethorpe as regarded intellect, had still never mixed in what could be called the select society of the place, his wife not being by any means a lady. And though you might meet Audrey in the street now, and not know, so far as dress and carriage and appearance went, that she had not the bluest of blood in her veins—except that her nose had scarcely enough bridge to it, and her chin was too square—still Miss Burnaby never asked any of the upper-class people to come in to tea on those Saturday afternoons when she and Mrs.



Ferguson's daughter used to have such a cosy time together in the Manor House parlour. For as she said it was quite necessary and proper to think about these things, and if you did not think about them there was no telling what society might come to.

So it was "the General," when, one Saturday afternoon, during the late summer following Mrs. Haythorne's arriving at the Lodge, Miss Burnaby told Audrey that Jack had had a letter from Phil Hathaway.

"Indeed! And I hope he is very well. It is a long time since we heard anything about him now. He used to write to Papa sometimes, to say how he was getting on, but of course we don't have those letters now."

"No, my dear, and he may perhaps think that your Mamma would not care for the correspondence to be continued. He is getting on very well, though."

“Oh, yes! one can tell that by the papers. I saw the other day in one that I took up at Mrs. Haythorne’s, that he has two pictures in the smaller London galleries this year. Some of these days he will be in the Royal Academy itself, and will that not be an honour?”

“I should rather think it will, Audrey. He does not say much about his prospects this time, however, for he hopes to come soon himself and tell us all about them. You know his three years on the Continent come to an end in September.”

“So soon? How the time goes! And what will he do then?”

“Well, that is just what I was asking the General, only the other day. And he said he thought Phil could not do better than come and settle quietly down here for a little while, before he goes to London to establish himself there. Of course, you know, he

must go to London in the end. There is no other place for a man of talent."

"I wonder if we shall find very much difference in him," said Audrey. "Somehow when anyone has been living for three whole years surrounded by such beauty as Italy is full of, a little of it must get into his soul and shine out through his face."

"That is because you are so fond of beautiful things yourself, Audrey, and they have such an influence upon you. But I assure you I have known people come home from Italy after spending a great deal more than three years there, and you could not see the least sign of anything in their faces."

"Because the eye sees only what the soul gives it the power to see, I suppose."

"I don't know," said Miss Burnaby, who was not speculative. "But one thing I feel quite sure of, Phil will be as good and simple as ever. I don't think he will ever get *that* rubbed off."

“No, indeed.” And there was a quiet light in Audrey’s eyes as she said it. “Phil is the real thing, through and through, and so for him there is nothing to rub off. He is not electro-plated.”

Miss Burnaby laughed. She was very glad to hear Audrey say that, because Audrey never did say what she did not mean. And sometimes, when she did mean a thing, she was slow in saying it. But Miss Burnaby was glad, not only because Phil was a pet with the General, and since Mr. Ferguson’s death might be considered almost his own property, but because she had a pleasant little plan in her own mind in connection with the young artist, and that was that he should marry Audrey.

What could be more natural? She said so to herself, and said it to her brother too, sometimes, though she would not for the world have breathed it to anyone else,

knowing that things of that kind so often go wrong when talked about over-freely. But amongst the weddings that could possibly take place in Dimplethorpe, where the opportunities of selection were almost as limited as those of the crowned heads of Europe, no two people could be picked out more suitable to each other than Audrey Ferguson and Phil Hathaway. They were just right in point of age, and they had tastes in common. Audrey had that sort of natural refinement about her which would fit itself to any position her husband might achieve. And though Phil's early associations in Dimplethorpe were not of the choicest, still, since old Ben Hathaway died, there was nobody in the place belonging to him. Indeed in that respect he was better off than Audrey, whose collateral branches seemed likely to root themselves in all directions, and produce a plentiful growth

of relationships which would be anything but an advantage to her, looking at them from a social point of view. Most likely Audrey saw that herself, for, though quite a lady now in manners and appearance, she had the most perfect tact in never presuming beyond her position. That being the case, how pleasant it would be for her to marry Phil, because she would enable him to exercise the same prudence, which was so important in a place like Dimplethorpe. He would be done for at once if he too rashly attempted to ignore the past, and take his place in society like a man who had everything to support him in his antecedents.

Miss Burnaby laid it all out in her own mind. Phil was to lodge with Miss Parley in the vicarage lane. It was the very place for an artist. You had only to sit at one end of the upstairs bow-window, to

command a view of those beautiful East Warrenshire hills, of which he used to be so fond ; or, if you turned round and sat at the other end, there was the most perfect rustic picture which brush could paint ; the grey church-tower peeping above the elm-trees, and the quaint little tumble-down lath and plaster cottages beyond, with the ivy climbing over their lichened gables, and one corner of the castle visible beyond that dear old duck-weedy moat which people said was so unhealthy, but which was really nothing of the sort. Phil must go there ; that was settled.

Then of course she would introduce him at once to Mrs. Haythorne, who was almost as much of an artist as himself. She was a woman who would thoroughly delight in his companionship ; and then at the Lodge he would meet Audrey, who was really more like a sister there than anything else. It

was quite pleasant to see how she had fitted into her place, and what sympathy there was between them. Phil would see her in quite a new light at Meadowfield Lodge. She seemed to come out to so much more advantage there than amongst the commonplace surroundings of her home, where a little of the vulgarity in which it was steeped—Miss Burnaby thought she was not uncharitable in calling it vulgarity—could scarcely help being reflected upon herself.

And then they should meet at the Manor House, where, if things did show the least disposition to move in the right direction, it would be so easy to facilitate them. There were such delightful nooks and corners in the Manor House garden. There was that sheltered grassy walk behind the lilac-trees, and the little pasture beyond, sloping up to a summer-house in a clump of trees. There



was a fine prospect of the village and the osier flats from that clump of trees, and if Phil had a mind to paint it, there was no earthly reason why they should not all go up there together in the warm September days; and then she could amuse herself collecting flowers whilst the young people sketched and became attached to each other to their heart's content.

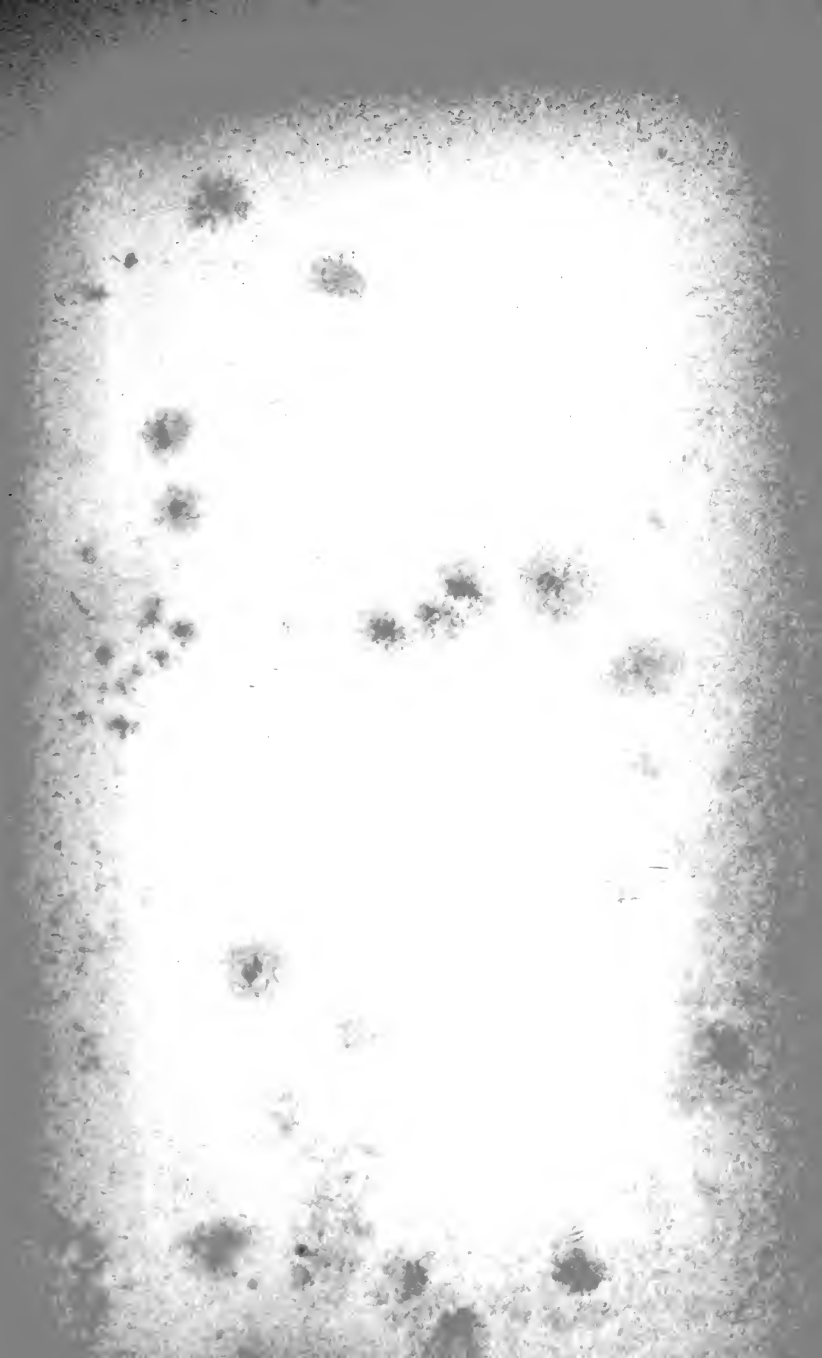
Oh, it would all be so pleasant and straightforward. Little Miss Burnaby could scarcely keep from telling Audrey just something of what was in her mind. If only Audrey had not been that sensitive sort of girl who would shut up and turn away from you directly if so much as a hint was given of anything of the kind. Still it must surely come right, for wherever in all the world could two people have been found who were so exactly cut out for each other?

It was all this that was shining in Miss

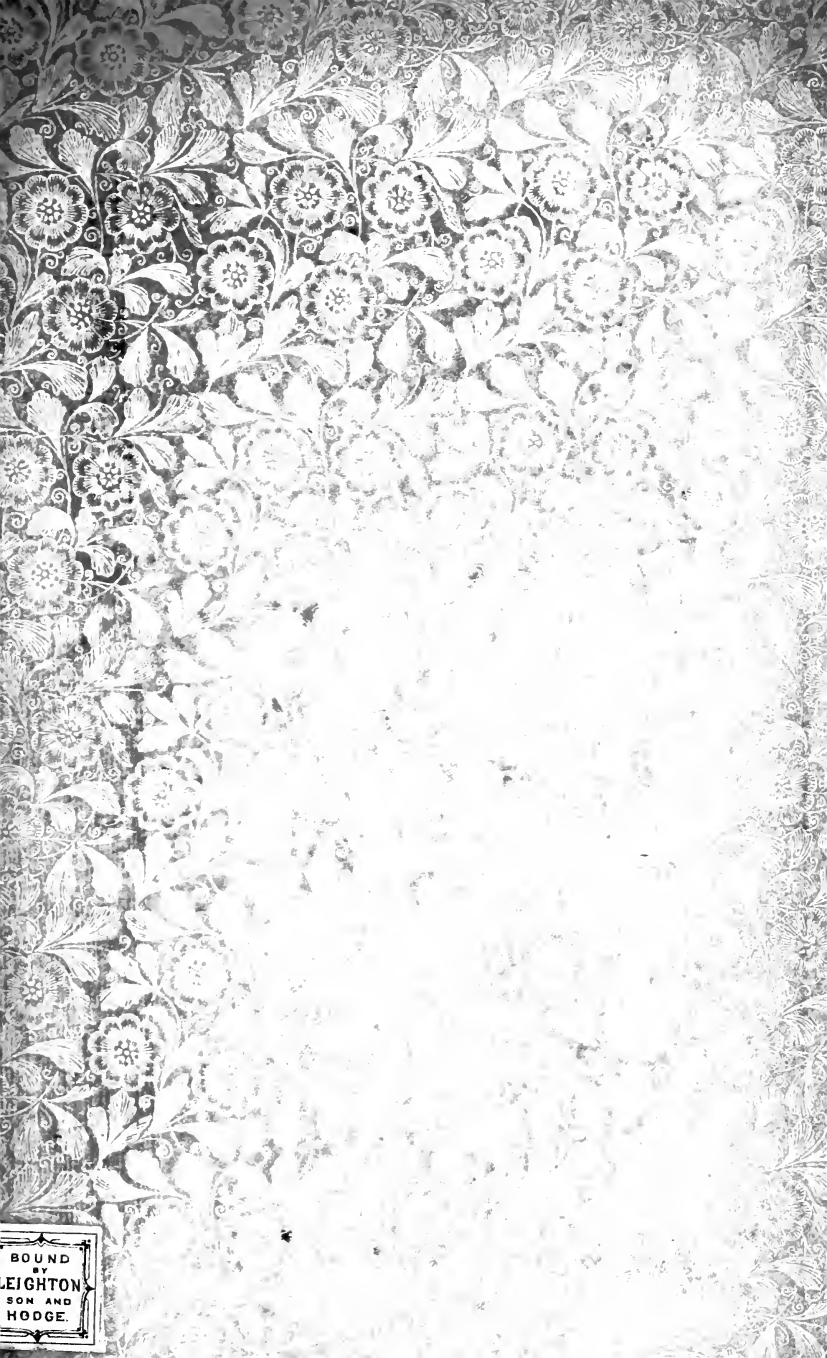
Burnaby's eyes and smiling on her lips as she said to Audrey that Saturday afternoon—

“And the General has had a letter from Phil, my dear.”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







BOUND  
BY  
LEIGHTON  
SON AND  
HODGE.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 042230901